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AUGUST 1957 VOL. 31 NO. 8



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BY THE EDITOR

- The October issue of *Amazing Stories* will be one of the most important ever to hit the newsstands, in that half the book will be devoted to an exhaustive factual inquiry into *UFO*, more commonly called Flying Saucers. There has been so much pro and con devoted to the subject: *They are! They ain't! They're from outer space! They're closely guarded secret weapons! They're optical illusions. You're wrong! I'm right!* that some sort of a common meeting ground for all opinions seems pertinent.

We, personally have only one clear thought on the subject: That it's high time for something to be proved one way or another. We feel public opinion backs us up on this. Interest has been quietly intensifying over recent months. People want to quit wondering.

We feel one of the difficulties involved is that the "show us" folks—the middle-of-the-roaders—find an intensely *pro* article one place in the public press and a fanatical *con* treatise somewhere else. By the time they read the latter, they remember only vaguely what the former was based on.

So *Amazing Stories* is going to bring all factions together in one issue, thus creating a sort of Flying Saucer forum. You will hear from Ray Palmer, who has been saving some startling information for this issue. And we are deeply grateful to Ray because he publishes a magazine devoted to Flying Saucers and is, in essence, giving *Amazing Stories* some of his most potent ammunition. An article by Richard Shaver—"I Wrote About Them First"—will brief many initiates on the fascinating history of the *UFO* riddle. And there will be many others.

(Continued on page 130)

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6 The Beast seemed to be saying, "Come on



MONSTER ON STAGE 4

By HENRY SLESAR

How long before we'll achieve the ultimate in screen realism? Take monster pictures for instance. Will real monsters be used in the future? Henry Slesar says, yes. With one proviso however—if the darned beasties can be taught their lines.

OUTSIDE Ross O'Brien's bivouac, the tweels were making excited noises, not unlike the chittering of crickets gone mad. The hunter stirred restlessly on his bunk and invented a good round curse. Ross should have been accustomed to the little Martian insects' frantic outbursts by now, after eight years of tracking on the red planet, but the shrill sound still set his teeth on edge.

He flopped over and kicked his feet off the bed, his hand reaching out automatically for the oxygen rifle leaning against the bunk. A shot over their heads would disperse

the little wedge-shaped creatures; then maybe he could get some sleep.

He padded outside the plastic tent and saw that dawn was already edging over the misty horizon, the sky glowing with that crazy purple color peculiar to the planet. He couldn't see the tweels in the thick tangle of underbush surrounding his camp, but he could hear them all right.

"Okay, you nutty little bedbugs," he growled. "Scat! Go on, get away!"

The chittering increased in volume, and Ross lifted the oxygen rifle to his shoulder, pointing the nose towards the rising sun. He flipped off the silencer, pumped, and the blast of compressed air exploded over the foliage with a deafening roar.

For a moment, the tweels were silent. Then they started again.

"What the hell." Ross scratched the thick black hair on his head. After seven months in the jungle, it had grown almost shoulder-length. "What's with you beasties this morning?" Then he laughed, and stretched his long muscular body until the sleep was out of the muscles and joints. "All

right, fellas. Time to shove on anyway."

He went back to his tent and started to pack his gear. The camp had been only temporary; an intermediate site from which to plan his next move. The goofus he was tracking was cunning; it seemed to know the hunter was on its trail, and kept to the water routes of the planet. But Ross wasn't worried. As long as his radar-gun was working, the giant lizard would never be out of rifle-distance. Sooner or later, he'd bag the carnivore, and then collect the five thousand UN-dollars that was the standing reward from the Interplanetary Commission.

And Ross needed the money. The tourist trade on Mars had hit bottom with the start of the Earth depression over a year ago. Goofus money used to be a luxury for the hunter; now it bought his daily bread.

He sighed as he dropped the last item in his travel-pack, and hoisted the gear to his back. Suddenly, he began to have thoughts of Earth, and the thoughts were painful. Because Earth made him think of Amelia, his dead wife. And Amelia made him think of . . .

"Nuts," Ross said aloud,

and collapsed the plastic tent into a six-inch square that fitted neatly into his hip pocket.

He plodded off down the trail, and the excited noises of the tweels seemed to follow him enroute. They grew shriller by the minute, until Ross's normally placid nerves began to go ragged.

"Shut up!" he screamed at the invisible insects.

They didn't.

An hour later, Ross dropped to the spongy terrain and set up his radar-gun to get a fix on the meandering goofus. The tweels had him so flustered that he handled the sensitive instrument badly. He cursed it fluently, but even that didn't help.

Finally, he got a blip that indicated the presence of a large moving body some ten miles to the north, where the Yellow Desert spread its ochre blanket over a fourth of the planet. He checked and double-checked the reading, because it didn't make sense.

"That's screwy," he muttered. "Never heard of a goofus making for the desert." He looked at the blip again and tugged at his matted beard. "Unless it isn't a goofus . . ."

The statement brought an immediate response from the

surrounding tweels. The little creatures set up a chittering concert, and Ross said:

"Maybe that's why all the excitement this morning. Maybe we got ourselves a visitor."

He returned the radar-gun to his gear, and headed North.

Three hours later, he knew why the tweels were so upset.

A space vessel, white and squat, with a formidable cluster of rocket tubes, was sitting on the sands of the Yellow Desert, and crewmen in neat gray uniforms were setting up the initial camp site. Ross looked at the ship with admiration. It was no spacebeaten old threestager; this was a modern atom-powered ship, a real luxury cruiser, the kind that rarely descended anywhere but the plush spacefield of Marsport, on the fertile side of the red planet.

He trudged over the sands towards the ship, and the crewmen paused in their labors to watch his progress. When he got closer, and saw the spotlessness of their attire, the smooth-shaven faces and trimmed hair, he realized that he must appear like some desert wild man.

"Hello!" he shouted, waving his arms. They stared

back, unmoving. Then a figure climbed down the ladder of the ship, and returned his greeting.

Ross came closer, and made out the man's face. It was a handsome face, with even white teeth, and too many wrinkles around the eyes and mouth.

"Hi, there," the man said. "I'm Jock Thurston, U. S." He stuck out his hand and Ross took it.

"O'Brien," the hunter said, clearing his throat. "Pittsburgh, originally, Mars for the last eight years."

"Ross O'Brien?"

"That's right."

"Well, that's a break," Thurston smiled. He looked back towards the aperture of the ship and called out: "Hey, Leo! Aurora! Come out and say hello. Mr. O'Brien's dropped into our laps! Never thought he'd be the first one we'd see."

His shout brought a short, portly figure to the opening. The man's round head was innocent of hair, but that was its only sign of innocence. He had old, knowing eyes and a slitted mouth that couldn't seem to manage an honest smile. When he saw the hunter, his mouth turned downwards, and he clambered slowly to the ground.

"You O'Brien?" he grunted. "I'm Leo Gower."

"Mr. Gower's production head," Thurston grinned.

"Producing what?" Ross said.

The fat man barked a short mirthless laugh. "Good question, Jocko."

"Of Cosmic Studios," Thurston said, flushing slightly. You must have heard of us, Mr. O'Brien. Third biggest movie company in the world."

"And the poorest," Gower said bitingly. He looked around the weirdly-colored terrain, at the blue-green foliage and muddled purple sky. "What a spot for a nightmare. How do you stand it out here, O'Brien?"

"I manage."

"And very well, I understand." Thurston's cheerfulness was restored. "According to what we've heard about you, Mr. O'Brien, you have quite a reputation. Didn't you bag that Mercurian dragon-thing a few years ago."

"Almost ten years ago, when I was just a punk kid, fresh out of college. It was just a lucky accident, if you want the truth."

"Modest," Gower said flatly. "And how about these big Martian lizards, these what-

do-you-call-'em? You catch many of those?"

"I've killed a few goofus," Ross said, "That's what the hunters call them. They're worth five thousand UN-dollars for every carcass; it's really a business with me."

"I didn't say kill." The fat man's eyes fixed him. "I said catch, Mr. O'Brien."

"Hey! Don't forget me!"

The sound of the woman's voice in the Martian stillness jerked them to attention, and Ross more than the others. It had been seven months since he'd seen an Earth woman, and eight years since he'd seen a woman like this. She stood framed in the opening of the ship, her tailored space costume curving subtly and lovingly around her tall, long-legged figure, detracting nothing from the ripeness of her body. Her hair was a golden halo around her angelic face, and yet the effect was more satanic. Even at the distance, the blood-redness of her mouth was a shock, and the deep sea-green of her eyes was startling.

Ross found himself staring, and then he became acutely conscious of his tangled, shoulder-length hair, his unlovely beard and grimy clothing.

She came down the ladder, and made quite a maneuver of it. Thurston looked on with a frankly appreciative grin. Gower merely looked blank. As for Ross, he was turning crimson beneath the black whiskers.

"Aurora—meet the famous space hunter, Ross O'Brien." Thurston made the introduction with exaggerated suavity. Ross, this is Aurora Lee, the brightest star in Cosmic's firmament. Perhaps you've seen her in—but I guess you don't see many movies up here, do you?"

"No," Ross said. The girl held out her hand, and he took it gingerly. It was a small hand, and cool to the touch.

"Happy to meet you." She turned up the candlepower of her smile. "Heard an awful lot about you, Mr. O'Brien. You must lead a terribly exciting life." She fluttered her lashes, and Ross frowned.

"It's all right."

"Come on," Gower said aggressively. "Let's go back and have a little drink. What do you say?"

"Fine idea," Thurston said. "Brought some good Earth whiskey with us, Mr. O'Brien."

"Swell," Ross said. "That'll be swell."

By this time, the energetic crewmen had set up a plastic shelter to the right of the vessel, complete with real chairs and a table. A word from Thurston sent one of the crew back into the ship for the necessities, and Ross found himself holding a tinkling highball glass ten minutes later.

"All the comforts of Earth," Thurston grinned. "We don't believe in roughing it, Mr. O'Brien."

"You've got a point." He knocked back his drink and then wiped his mouth with his sleeve. When he saw Thurston's amused face and Aurora Lee's raised eyebrow, he said: "Sorry. It's awfully easy to go primitive out here—"

"And why not?" Aurora said. "It must be wonderful, alone in the wilderness. I'd love to take off all my clothes and go swinging through the jungle—like that what's-his-name, you know, Leo—"

The production head snorted. "You take off all your clothes, you wouldn't be alone for long."

"Tell us more about the goofus," Thurston prompted. "Never seen one of the beasts, except for photos."

"Well, they're roughly in

the brontosaurus family, like the prehistoric creatures in the early days of Earth. Only bigger, I'd guess—they average from eight to two hundred feet tall. And they're meat-eaters, any kind of meat. Including each other. And including Man."

Aurora shuddered.

"The worst thing about the goofus is that they go stalking around the Earth settlements when things are bad, looking for tasty morsels. That's why the Interplanetary Commission has set up this five thousand UN-dollar reward for every goofus killed."

"How many have you collected?"

"Forty, forty-five. I've lost count. It's a matter of patience and the right equipment. The radar-gun tracks 'em down, eventually; an oxygen blast between the eyes finishes them off."

Gower's eyes narrowed. "How about getting one into captivity? Ever do that?"

"That's a tall order. And who'd want one of the damned things anyway?"

Thurston and Gower exchanged glances.

"You know much about the picture business?" the older man asked.

"Not a thing."

"No, I guess you wouldn't. Well, let me give you a fast idea of what's been happening to the industry in the past couple of years. You know about the depression—"

"Sure. It's even hit us up here. No more rich Earth tourists for us to pluck."

"Well, it hit the movie business pretty hard. But some companies are still making money, by capitalizing on a trend."

"What trend?"

"Space," Gower said. "Space and spaceships and space monsters. You know the kind of stuff—there was a whole rash of it in the last century. Only now, with the colonization of Mars, the explorations of Mercury, Venus, Jupiter—well, the only kind of picture that makes money is a real whinging science-type thriller. There were forty of 'em produced last year, by practically every studio, and twenty-two of the forty ranked in the top thirty moneymakers. So that is how the ball bounces—and that's why we took ourselves a trip here."

Aurora Lee, sitting next to the hunter, had allowed her knee to rest against Ross's leg. He swallowed hard, and made himself a third drink. It had been a long time since

he'd tasted whiskey, or been so close to touch a woman, and there was an unfamiliar buzzing in his head that might have been caused by either.

He said: "Going to do a picture on Mars? I don't see what's so great about that. There's been a dozen movie companies around here for the last few years."

"But we've got something different," Thurston said smugly. "We've got an idea that'll make all those space operas look silly—"

"Jocko!" Gower's tone was sharp.

"I wasn't going to give it away," Thurston said, looking hurt. "But if we want Mr. O'Brien to cooperate, we've got to let him know—"

Gower looked pointedly at the hunter's gear. "The thing is this, Mr. O'Brien. We've heard tell that you're the best damn hunter on the planet. We came down to the Yellow Desert specifically to enlist your services."

Ross looked puzzled. "What for?"

"We want to go goofus-hunting with you."

"You mean for a movie?"

"That's the idea. We want you to bag us a goofus—alive."

The hunter put down his glass. "Sorry, Mr. Gower. Like I told you—it's a tall order. You can gas the beasts unconscious, but not for long. The best goofus is a dead one, and that's the way I like it."

"But we don't want a full-grown one," Thurston said. "We want a small goofus, even an infant. We want one that's transportable."

Aurora giggled. "A baby dinosaur! How cute!"

"Not so cute," Ross said stiffly. "The female goofus is viciously protective of its offspring. Your chances of grabbing off a goofus-baby are a thousand to one. And what for? What good will it do you?"

"You let us worry about that," Gower said. "How long do these things take to get full grown? I understand it's pretty quick."

"It varies. Usually eight months to a year. And even then, you never know how big they'll get; the size varies from creature to creature, for some reason." He watched Gower's face. "I get it. You want to smuggle a goofus baby back to Earth; you figure on making some kind of monster picture down there."

Thurston chuckled. "Some kind is right."

"Well, you can forget it. There's a stiff penalty for that sort of thing—on *both* planets. I'm not interested in sitting out the next ten years in jail. Sorry."

He stood up, somewhat shakily.

"Wait a minute."

"Thanks for the drink," Ross said. He nodded at Thurston and Gower, letting his eyes hang too long on Aurora Lee. "Nice to have met you all, but I've got some tracking to do."

"You haven't heard our proposition yet," Gower said. "Twenty-five thousand UN-dollars for a goofus baby—"

"Sorry."

"—and twenty-five thousand more, plus all expenses, if you take charge of raising the beast on Earth. Better give it more thought."

The words stopped the hunter. Fifty thousand dollars and a year on Earth was tempting. A vision of his home planet sped across his mind, and there was no image of Amelia, his dead wife. He looked back and forth at the faces of the three visitors: the girl smiling brilliantly and vacantly at him; Thurston looking over-sincere and persuasive; Gower implacable.

"I'll think about it," Ross

said. "I've got a goofus to catch."

"What for?" Gower said craftily. "Just for sport?"

"No. For bread and butter."

"You won't get much to eat that way. Guess you've been in the wilds too long, Mr. O'Brien. You're out of touch."

"What does that mean?"

"They've changed the ruling on goofus-hunting," Thurston said, watching Ross's face. "They've appointed a government hunting commission to clear the planet of the beasts. Simultaneously, they've dropped the standing reward for goofus carcasses."

"You're kidding," Ross said sharply.

"So help me; we heard it in Marsport. The new rule's been in effect for two months. So if you want to track that goofus down, the only way you'll get bread-and-butter is on a government payroll."

"For a hundred a month and food?"

Aurora reached out and touched his elbow. "Why not do it our way, Mr. O'Brien? I think you'll enjoy Hollywood."

He looked at her red mouth. Then he said:

"Okay. But it won't be any picnic."

They waited until the misty purple haze called "morning" broke over the planet before starting the trek into the pulpy jungle of Mars.

Ross spent a bad night in his own tent, not twenty yards from the plastic dwelling where Aurora Lee slept. Her nearness troubled him throughout the night, and when she insisted upon joining the hunt the next day, his answer was unnecessarily brusque.

"No, absolutely not. No woman can take it."

He had a painful thought of his dead wife, like a knife stab.

Aurora pouted prettily. "I'll be good, I promise. Make him take me, Leo."

"Mr. O'Brien's in charge. Me, I'll stick with the ship."

She cajoled the hunter until his face, now stripped of its beard by an early-morning shave, flushed the color of a sunset. Finally, he grumbled agreement, and Ross, Thurston, and girl headed into the blue-green foliage on the trail of the goofus.

They were only half a mile advanced before Aurora began to complain. The terrain was too spongy; the air was too fetid; the tweeds' incessant chattering was nerve-wrack-

ing; the pace was too fast. Ross turned on her angrily and snapped: "It was your idea, baby. I warned you."

"Don't call me baby! I just want to know how long this sort of thing keeps up. When do we find this silly monster of yours?"

Ross cursed, and dropped to one knee, unstrapping the radar-gun. "I'll get a fix on him now."

Thurston mopped his brow. "We could have used a copter. We should have brought a preassembly copter with us; it would have been easier."

"The hell it would. The goofus would spot us in a minute; there's no bird life on the planet."

He studied the tiny screen until he saw a blip.

"We're in luck. There's a goofus within four miles. But whether it leads us to an infant is another story. It may take days—"

"Days?" Thurston blanched. "You didn't tell us that, O'Brien."

"I told you it wasn't going to be easy. If you want to head back for the ship right now, I can radio them for the copter to pick you up."

"We'll stick," Thurston said. "But if this goofus doesn't lead us anywhere, I suggest we all go back."

The march into the jungle continued.

Two hours later, with Aurora limping dramatically on a blistered heel, and with Thurston muttering to himself, they came to a clearing in the foliage where the silence was surprising.

"Listen," Ross said.

Aurora grimaced. "I don't hear a thing."

"That's what I mean. No tweels around; that means something's scared them off. And from the dampness of the ground, it figures that there's a water area not far off."

"So what?" Thurston said.

"All signs point to a goofus. Everywhere the beast goes, the tweels clear out in a hurry. And its favorite habitat is a nice muddy water hole. The goofus are amphibious."

"I don't see anything," Aurora said. "If the goofus is so damn big, wouldn't we see it?"

"We'll see it soon enough if it's here. Let's locate that water."

In another half hour, they came to a murky brown lake on the other side of the clearing. The water seemed motionless, except for the stirring of dead vegetation afloat

on its surface, and the occasional splash of a red-eyed waterbug leaping out of the depth.

"Ugh!" Aurora said. "Hardly the place for a beach club—"

"I don't see a thing," Thurston said testily. "I think that radar gimmick is out of whack—"

Ross unstrapped his oxygen rifle and primed it.

"Keep away from the bank. When the goofus shows up, he moves fast. It's no use running, he'll catch up too fast. Best thing to do is keep firing."

Thurston readied his weapon, but he still looked dubious. "I think you're wrong. I think we lost the trail—"

"Wait and see," the hunter said.

He lifted the oxygen rifle towards the sky, flicked off the silencer, and pumped. The startling, explosive sound broke and echoed over the water, the concussion shaking the ground beneath their feet. Aurora gave a little yelp of fear.

"Now," Ross whispered.

In the center of the brown lake, the waters began to bubble and froth.

"Look!"

The waters trembled as if the lake bottom had been

seized by a violent volcanic eruption. Then they parted, and a mountain exploded out of the lake, a mountain of hide and tissue and teeth, a mountain that became defined as a monstrous head of something ancient and nightmarish and completely terrifying!

"My God!" Thurston recoiled at the sight of the creature. "The size—"

"Don't shoot," the hunter warned. "Wait—"

Now the head was rising high above the water, sending a shower of muddy drops spraying over them, until its incredibly scaly body was visible, a body skyscraper-sized and covered with gleaming armor that seemed invincible. The thing raised its sharp-taloned claws in the air, raking at nothing, and then its great lizard's eyes spotted them.

"It sees us!" the girl shrieked.

"Don't run!" Ross grabbed her arm. "Hold your ground. When it heads for us, Thurston—shoot for the head. Only the head!"

The goofus was wading towards them, growing more terrible with every step.

"Now!" the hunter shouted.

He dropped Aurora's arm to lift his rifle. The moment she was free of his grasp, the girl broke for the clearing behind them, running heedlessly on her blistered feet, her mouth open and screaming with horror. Ross looked after her once, and then brought the rifle to his shoulder. He fired once and missed. He pumped again, and shouted at Thurston:

"Fire! Fire, you fool!"

But Thurston was merely staring, unable to move. Ross raised his weapon once more and sent a blast straight for the creature's head. The air-bullet exploded against the beast's jaw, shattering one side and sending a flow of steaming blood down the creature's side.

"Thurston!" Ross yelled.
"Start firing!"

Thurston gave him a wild look, and dropped his rifle at the hunter's feet. Then he whirled and ran back to the clearing, after the girl.

The action unnerved the hunter. By the time he raised his oxygen rifle again, the beast had become wiser, and had plunged back underneath the water.

Ross cursed, picked up the movie man's weapon, and started after them.

He found Thurston comforting the sobbing movie queen. He looked at them both with disgust, and flung Thurston's weapon on the ground.

"Thanks a lot for the help," he said bitterly. "Now we got ourselves a wounded goofus in the lake. We'll have to track it down if it takes a year—"

"Why?" Thurston said.
"The hell with the thing. It's a baby we want, not one of those monsters."

"You know we can't leave him. He'll go on a rampage, when he starts feeling the pain. No settlement will be safe."

"You can track him if you want, O'Brien. I'm taking Aurora back to the ship; radio Leo for the copter."

"That's what I want!"

"Suits me," Ross shrugged.
"Go right ahead."

An hour later, the whirlybird appeared in the hazy sky overhead and dropped to the clearing. Aurora, still sobbing with her reaction to the incredible beast, climbed aboard. Thurston followed, but looked back at the hunter before the copter rose.

"Sure you don't want to come, O'Brien?"

"No thanks. I've still got work to do."

"No money in it, you know."

"That's my worry."

He turned his back and walked off into the foliage, heading for the lake.

It was almost nightfall before Ross gave up the search for the wounded Martian beast. He followed the bank of the vast muddy lake until its terminal point at the edge of a craggy precipice that dropped an alarming thousand feet to a bottomless valley below. Tired, he dropped to the ground and stretched out his body, and allowed himself some speculative thoughts.

No matter how he tried to avoid them, his thoughts were of Amelia. Amelia and the jungles of Mercury, Amelia and the penthouse in the New York, Amelia in her silver bathing suit or her white ermine coat, Amelia, Amelia . . .

He shut his eyes, trying to keep the memory off.

Then he began thinking of another woman, a long-legged blonde-haired woman with an angelic face and satanic eyes . . .

He must have dozed off, because when he opened his eyes again, the sky overhead was deeply purple, the color of Martian night.

He was about to unstrap his plastic tent and make camp when he heard the clucking sound in the jungle.

He froze, and waited.

Then, noiselessly, he followed the strange sound to its source.

The moment he saw the tip of the great scaly tail lying flat and still in the heavy jungle-growth, he knew that he had found his goofus, and that the beast had succumbed to its wound and died.

But it was the strange clucking sound that interested him most, the sound of an infant goofus complaining and grieving at the death of its parent.

The foot-high creature looked up timidly when Ross approached, and snapped its small sharp teeth in instinctive fear. The hunter laughed, and reached down for the animal. He held it up to his face and said:

"Come to papa, baby. You are my ticket home."

Cosmic Studios, with its four hundred flat-roofed structures spreading over twelve square miles, bustled with incongruous activity beneath the hot Hollywood sun.

Five hundred Indians in vivid war paint screeched

and cavorted as they attempted to scale a high wooden fortress in the middle of California, while its blue-coated defenders fired volley after volley into their ranks. The assault was obviously silly, considering that the fortress had only two walls.

Not a hundred yards away, a group of desperate space-men were clambering down a lunar crater, trying to escape the clutches of the devil-beast which lurked on the Moon—at least according to the script.

On another sound stage, a hoop-skirted young lady was slapping the face of a cavalry officer in defense of her honor. A rocket pilot was saying farewell to his tearful wife. A sneering criminal was shooting it out with the law. A lean-jawed cowboy was sipping a malted milk. A chorus of stunning young women were exchanging studio gossip before a scheduled dance number.

In other buildings, plans were being made, and meetings were being held. Production meetings, set meetings, technical meetings, casting meetings, meetings to decide what meetings should be held. And in the main building, an impressive 12-story

edifice of white marble, that most important meeting of all was underway—the story conference.

"It's a cockeyed natural, Mr. Gower! A sweetheart of an idea! A blockbuster!"

The man thudding the table with his fist seemed imbued with evangelical fire. His thin sunbrowned face had all the glow of a medieval saint. His name was Potter, and he was a writer.

Leo Gower, production head of the studio, reacted blankly to the outburst. His eyes slid over the face of Thurston, his assistant, and back to the vacant countenance of Aurora Lee. The only face he didn't examine was that of Ross O'Brien, and Ross's face was the only one at the conference table which reflected any emotion.

"I think it stinks," the hunter growled. "I know you don't give a damn for my opinion, but I say it stinks."

Potter whirled on him. "You bet we don't give a damn, nature boy. You just stick to raising your lizard—leave the story problems to us."

Gower grunted. "Mr. O'Brien's right, Potter. The story line's lousy."

Thurston let out a sigh and said: "Just what I was

thinking, Leo. It's got no zing at all. Just routine monster stuff."

"I thought it was cute," Aurora said.

Potter looked crestfallen. Then his face brightened once more, and he said: "Well, that was only one approach, Mr. Gower. Actually, I've got another one up my sleeve—"

"Let's hear it."

Potter's face began to work, and Ross couldn't stop the chuckle that came to his lips. It was easy to tell that the writer had no script in abeyance, but was concocting it on the spot. He watched the procedure with admiration.

"It goes like this, Mr. Gower. Aurora here, she plays the daughter of this famous rocket scientist. You know the type I mean, an old guy with white whiskers and eye glasses on the end of his nose, a sort of fuddy-duddy. Now this here old boy, he's planning to send a rocket ship to Jupiter, and Aurora is in love with the pilot of the ship—that's Tag Turner, of course. Now Tag is full of beans about the expedition and all, but Aurora hates the idea. She says, 'John, you go to Jupiter and our engage-

ment is off.' That kind of thing. But Tag figures he's *got* to go, understand. Man's inconquerable spirit, you understand. How does that sound, Mr. Gower?"

The production head lit a cigar. "I'm listening."

"Well, so off goes the rocket ship, plenty of fanfare, lots of stock shots, space mockups, that kind of thing. Then we do a big bit on Jupiter, plenty of fancy scenery, lots of crazy animals, you know what I mean. Then Tag finds this little baby goofus, and figures he'll bring it back for study. You see the plot?"

"I've seen it, all right." Ross slid further into his chair.

Potter shot him a hateful look and continued. "So back to Earth goes our hero, with the little baby monster. Aurora forgives him and is all set to marry him, see? Only the baby starts getting bigger and bigger and finally escapes. Right in the middle of the wedding, this big lizard starts breaking things up, starts smashing a whole big chunk of New York. Sound good?"

Gower looked at his cigar end. "It's rough, but maybe we can do something with it."

"Sure!" Potter licked his

lips. "But can't you just see the contrast? The hero in his tuxedo, battling the monster on Fifth Avenue? And Aurora here, in a real tight-fitting wedding gown? It'll be sensational!"

"The big thing is the New York scene," Gower said. "Let's not lose sight of that. That's what'll make this picture box-office."

"That's right," Thurston said eagerly. "Have to allow plenty of time for that. It's what you call the high spot—" He giggled suddenly, and Gower looked at him sharply.

"I still say it stinks," Ross said. "But that's your business. I'm just an animal trainer."

"I think it's cute," Aurora said.

"Okay, let's break it up," Gower told them. "Write me a synopsis, Potter, and we'll meet again on Wednesday."

After the meeting, Ross strolled across the lot, past a parade of Roman soldiers on their way to the studio commissary. He headed in the direction of the fenced-off area marked: DANGER—KEEP OUT! But before he reached his destination, he heard Aurora's voice behind him.

"Mr. O'Brien! Wait a minute!"

"Hello, Miss Lee. I was just going to look in on our friend—"

"I thought you were. Mind if I come along?"

"Okay with me." He looked at her, trying not to let his eyes linger. In shorts and halter, Aurora Lee was the picture of womanly provocation, and Ross was still not accustomed to it.

The uniformed guard at the gate nodded to them as he unlocked the front entrance. They walked across the gravel courtyard to the door of a massive stone building that still bore the sign: STAGE FOUR. It had once been a studio; now its function was solely that of a cage for the creature transported from Mars.

Inside the building, a husky young man was loading crates labeled "U. S. Government Inspected Horsemeat" against the wall. He grinned at Ross when the hunter entered, and lowered his eyes shyly when he saw the movie queen.

"Hi, Robby," Ross said. "How's our friend doing?"

"Doing just fine, Mr. O'Brien." The young man grinned all over his freckled face. "He's a mighty tame little cuss. I hope he'll grow

up to be a little more ornery, or Mr. Gower's gonna be awfully upset."

"I wouldn't worry about that part of it." The hunter looked towards the far wall, where the goofus, now a respectable six-feet tall, was munching on a slab of raw meat. The creature looked up at them, without exorbitant interest. It was ugly and fierce-looking, but there was a softness in its round eyes that made it appear gentle and even friendly.

They walked closer to the beast, and it watched their approach with caution, but without fear.

"Eats, sleeps, and plays around," Robby said cheerfully. "That's about all it does. It's a great fly-catcher, too—we're never bothered with insects as long as Louie's around."

"Louie?" Aurora said.

"That's what I call him," the young man said. "Louie the lizard. Makes it easier to carry on a conversation."

The girl laughed. "What do you talk about?"

"Oh, I tell him my troubles, about my girl, that sort of stuff. He's a swell listener."

"Aren't you afraid of it?"

"Nothing to be afraid of," Ross said. "Not yet. But in a few months—" He looked

towards another wall, at the racks that held a row of oxygen guns and pacifying weapons. "We're keeping our arsenal ready, just in case the goofus gets rambunctious."

Aurora shivered. "When I think of that thing loose in New York—"

Ross chuckled. "Don't take it so seriously. We'll keep the beast under control when we finally get it into the studio. Then it can thrash around your phoney set all it likes."

Aurora still looked troubled, and Ross noted it with puzzlement. But in another moment, she was smiling brightly, and inviting him to lunch.

They dined at the studio commissary, and Ross took the opportunity to ask some pointed questions.

"What did Gower mean back on Mars—when he said the studio was poor? Was that a gag?"

"I'm afraid not. Despite all the activity—Cosmic is right on the brink of bankruptcy. It's this awful depression, of course. We used to make a hundred and fifty pictures a year—now we're making forty. Mr. Gower figures our only salvation, for a while at least, is a really

big moneymaker. He's sort of pinned his hopes on this monster picture."

Ross looked at her curiously.

"I can't figure you out, Aurora. Sometimes you talk like every dumb blonde ever invented. Other times, you sound real sensible."

The comment seemed to startle her. She looked up from her meal and blinked her long dark lashes.

"Who, me?" she said. "Why, Mr. O'Brien! I haven't got a brain in my head."

"I'm not so sure. I think you do a lot of acting without cameras. What for?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe because it's expected of me. You know how things are in Hollywood."

"I don't know. All I know is that there's something screwy about this whole damn production."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I can't see all this excitement for just another monster picture. There's been thousands of 'em. Why should this one be any better than the others?"

She flushed, and looked at her plate. "I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. O'Brien."

"The hell you don't. Either

there's something special about this picture, or else Leo Gower's not as bright as he's cracked up to be. What's the gimmick, Miss Lee?"

She glanced up suddenly, and seemed grateful when she recognized someone in the dining room. "Oh, look! It's Tag!"

Ross frowned. The trim figure of an Army general made their way to the table. He turned out to be a young, square-jawed, almost beautiful man.

Aurora introduced him as Tag Turner, the co-star of the forthcoming Cosmic epic, and Ross shook hands grudgingly. He watched the movie star put his arm familiarly around Aurora's lovely shoulders, and squirmed uncomfortably in his chair.

"Understand you spent the last few years on Mars," Tag said respectfully. "Must have been very interesting, Mr. O'Brien."

"Fascinating," Ross said sourly.

"Always wanted to do some space-traveling. I've done a hell of a lot of it in movies, but I'd like to try the real thing."

"It's not quite so glamorous," the hunter said.

"But it's real, and that's what's important. Reality is

a big thing with me, Mr. O'Brien."

"So I see. That uniform—"

"This? Oh, I'm playing a general in a war movie. Looks pretty good, huh?"

"Looks fine. How old are you, Mr. Turner?"

"Me? Why, twenty-two."

Ross gagged on his chicken sandwich, and excused himself from the table.

He spent the rest of the afternoon investigating the unending rows of buildings that held a multiplicity of moviemaking operations. He found the tour interesting, marveling at the complexity of the equipment required. He was especially intrigued when he came across a structure bearing the sign: EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY.

The guard stopped him at the gate, tipping his hat deferentially.

"Sorry, Mr. O'Brien. Nobody comes through here without a pass. They never used to be so touchy about it, but they are now."

"Really? What goes on inside?"

"Don't really know, Mr. O'Brien. Film processing techniques; that's what they tell me. Don't know why that should be such a secret."

"Sounds pretty interesting. Like to look around, if it could be arranged."

The gatekeeper rubbed his jaw; there was admiration for the hunter's reputation in his eyes. Then he grinned and said: "Can't see any harm in it, Mr. O'Brien. Just don't hang around too long."

He unlatched the gate and Ross ambled through, heading for the doorway of the stucco building.

He found the door unlatched, and except for the muffled sound of pulsating machinery, the corridor was quiet.

There was a glassed-in cubicle to the right, obviously used for clerical purposes. It was empty.

The only other door was marked KEEP OUT. Ross shrugged, and pushed it open.

It was a large, square room, antiseptically white, with oddly assorted electronic equipment stacked against every wall. At the far end to the left, there was a curved no-glare glass, forming a window at a partitioned area some six feet square. A control board had been shoved up beneath the glass, and a row of colored lights winked on the panel. The sound he had heard in the corridor seemed to be emanating from this device.

He stepped up to the glass and peered inside.

There was a man lying supine on the floor, unmoving, his chest giving no evidence of breathing.

Ross's reaction was immediate. He sprung for the small door at the side of the chamber, unbolted it, and pushed his way inside. There was a faint, pungent odor in the air of the room, but he didn't think of it as he bent over the figure on the floor and felt for the pulse. There was none.

He started to hoist the man by the arms and drag him to the exit when the pungent aroma became more apparent. He sniffed it for a moment and failed to detect any threat in its slightly sweet, acrid fragrance. But his arms suddenly grew leaden, and all the will in his jungle-toughened muscles deserted him. He dropped the man's body to the floor again, and joined it a moment later beneath a blanket of spiraling darkness.

He awoke from a swift and dreamless sleep to see the faces of Gower and Thurston at the window of the chamber.

The older man's heavy jowled face was flushed with

anger. Thurston looked sheepish. They were arguing soundlessly outside the room, and the third man at their side, a white-frocked elderly man with a long, unhappy face, was shaking his head remorsefully.

Ross struggled to his feet, and the motion caught their attention. The white-coated man went to the door of the chamber and opened it.

"Please," he said, in Germanic accents. "You will come out now?"

"Sure," Ross said, and then realized that his spell of unconsciousness hadn't deprived him of any strength. He strolled out to face his employers.

Gower's teeth clicked when he addressed the hunter.

"What the hell were you doing in there?"

"What's the difference?" Ross said. "I've got a question for you, Mr. Gower. What's the idea of a gas chamber on a movie lot? Answer that."

"Never mind that," Thurston said testily. "This is private property, and you had no right to be here. For your information, we fired the guard who let you through."

Ross looked back at the glass and saw that the chamber was empty.

"There was another man in there—"

"A test subject," Thurston snapped. "We took him out yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Please," the elderly man said nervously. "We must be very careful—"

"The hell with being careful," Gower said. He looked at Ross meaningfully. "At this point, I think we should take Mr. O'Brien into our full confidence—"

"What did you mean about yesterday? How long was I in there?"

"Three days," Thurston said.

"What?"

"Three days," Gower repeated. "But don't worry. You were in the closest thing to suspended animation ever discovered. I'll bet you're not even hungry."

Ross rubbed his stomach, and realized that it was still contented by the sandwich meal he had eaten in the commissary, seventy-two hours before.

"What's it all about?"

"It's a test chamber, for a little product we've been experimenting with. Dr. Steiner here developed it in Germany, during the last war. It was never put to use, but it's a harmless little product.

We're not making any poison gas."

"But why?"

"For the movie," Thurston said bluntly. "For *Monster in Manhattan*."

"That's the title," Gower said. "We picked it while you were snoozing. Hope it meets with your approval."

"What's the gas got to do with the movie?"

The doctor looked more agitated than ever. "Mr. Gower, do you think it's wise—"

"Sure, doc, why not? Mr. O'Brien's going to handle our beast for us. He might as well know the plan of action." He turned to look Ross in the eyes. "We're thinking of using our suspended animation gas when we produce our little epic. We thought we might put the good citizens of New York to sleep for a little while. And while they take their forty winks—we're gonna make a movie. Get the idea?"

"No!"

"Then I'll spell it out for you. We're going to turn our goofus loose on the biggest damn movie set you ever saw in your life. The whole island of Manhattan is going to be our location. We'll have the most exciting, real-life movie

ever made—and once it's in the can, we ought to have one of the biggest money-makers of all time." Gower's normally implacable face was glowing. "Monster in Manhattan! Monster wrecks New York! No scale models, no trick shots, no phoney sets! The real thing, O'Brien—that's what they'll pay to see. The real thing!"

"You're crazy," the hunter said. "You can't do such a nutty thing—"

"We're going to do it," Thurston said. "If the gas doesn't do the job, we'll find another way. But we're determined to do it."

"Besides," Gower said, "there won't be too much damage. Nothing the insurance companies can't handle." He chuckled dryly.

"You'll be stopped before you start. If the right people hear about this—"

"Why should anybody hear? It's in our own interest that we keep silent. So we'll keep silent."

"You maybe," Ross said grimly. "But not me."

Thurston and Gower looked at each other, and the younger man grinned.

"You, too, Mr. O'Brien. In your interest."

"What does that mean?"

"It means we didn't pick

you out of a hat. And we didn't pick you because you were the best hunter in the business. Hell, there's fifty guys who could have done your job. We picked you for another reason."

Ross paled. "Let's hear it."

"Why get personal?" Gower grunted. "Let's just say we *know* you'll want to cooperate, Mr. O'Brien."

"Why should I?"

Thurston's grin widened. "You're a hard man, Mr. O'Brien. So we'll put it to you hard. You'll cooperate because of Amelia. The dame you married ten years ago. The dame you left behind on Mercury with an oxygen blast in her heart."

In another month, the goofus in the reconverted sound stage of Cosmic Studios was almost twelve feet tall. And with its rapid growth, the gentle obedience in the creature seemed to diminish. The soft light in its lizard-eyes hardened and brightened and grew red with mounting hatred for its jailers. Its talons grew long and sharp, its hide scaly and impenetrable as armor, its gleaming teeth diamond-hard and menacing. Robby, the young man in charge of the cage, no longer called the

goofus Louie. The beast had become too terrible for flip-pant names.

And in another month, Ross O'Brien was no longer calling Aurora Miss Lee.

"Aurora . . ."

He held her hand across the candlelit table in the secluded restaurant outside the city limits of Los Angeles, and said:

"Aurora—how'd they get you mixed up in this?"

She lowered her eyes.

"You won't like me any better when I tell you, Ross. But this movie business—it's so important to me. Ever since I was a child, I dreamed about Hollywood. Then, when I had the chance, I decided I'd do anything at all to make good. I found out that I didn't have to do much to make Leo Gower happy—just play the dumb blonde, and keep his cigars lit—"

Ross frowned. "But this crazy scheme of theirs—to wreck a city for the sake of a movie—"

"You don't know how bad things have been, Ross. The depression has just about put us out of business. Leo thinks the only thing that can save the studio is a really spectacular success. And besides, he promised there'd be no loss of life, no *real* damage—"

"He doesn't know the goofus," the hunter said grimly.

They sipped their after-dinner cordials, in silence for a while, and then the girl said:

"Tell me about Amelia, Ross."

He flushed. "What do you know about it?"

"Jock—Mr. Thurston told me. Even before we landed on Mars, he said he knew something about you that would make you cooperate fully. Something to do with —her. Is it true, Ross? That you—"

"No! Not the way that he thinks. Maybe not the way *you* think either."

"I don't know what to think. All he said was that you—killed your wife. And that you reported that she had been lost in the swamp—"

"That part's right," Ross said, and looked up sharply when he felt her hand withdraw from his. "But you've got to hear the whole story, Aurora."

"I'm listening."

"It happened almost eleven years ago," the hunter said, "when I was just a raw kid, full of crazy dreams about space hunting, determined to

get myself a reputation in a hurry. I joined an expedition team in the third Mercurian investigation. It was not any picnic. But I had some luck up there, pure dumb luck. I stumbled on one of those dragon-beasts, those fire creatures that everybody was so excited about. It was the first time any hunter had gotten close enough to knock one off, and that made me a hero. When I got back to Earth, I found myself idolized, pampered, adulated—just the way I'd always dreamed. That's when I met Amelia.

"I guess I was too blinded by my own spotlight to realize what Amelia was really like. She was beautiful, the beautiful young heiress every kid dreams about. And my reputation had her blinded, too; she thought I was the prize catch of the century. She even insisted on going with me on my next expedition, figuring it would be some kind of great thrill. So we married, and about a year later, we traveled to Mercury together."

His voice grew bitter.

"It was on Mercury, fifty million miles from Earth, that I found out about Amelia's lover. It was a hell of a place to learn the truth.

"A few days after we arrived, Amelia discovered that there was more discomfort than glamor in a Mercurian hunting expedition. She hated everything about it, hated the fact that she had to wear space gear every minute, hated the heat and the crude accommodations. She wanted to go back to Earth right away. We quarreled about it, and that's when she told me she had a boyfriend. She had a lot of fun telling me, too—Amelia was like that.

"I lost my head. I hit her. She went wild when I did that; Amelia couldn't stand being hit. She grabbed for my oxygen rifle; I swear she was going to use it—"

Ross stopped, shaken by the quick flash of memory.

"I reached for the rifle just as she was pumping it. She triggered it in the struggle and fell dead at my feet. That was how it happened, Aurora, so help me God.

"But the worst part of it was what I did next. I got scared, terrified at what the authorities would think. At first, I thought it would be best to claim a hunting accident. But the crew members knew that we hadn't left yet; I was afraid they would talk. So I decided the best thing

would be to bury her in one of those deep Mercurian swamps, and say she was lost.

"That's what I did. There was a search for her that lasted a month. When she wasn't found, they closed the case—and I went off to Mars. I didn't want to return to Earth ever again."

"But how do they know?" the girl whispered. "Leo and Jock Thurston? How do they know about it?"

"I'm not sure. One of the crewmen on the trip, probably. None of them said anything during the official inquest—but one of them must have been talking to your pals."

"I think it's terrible of them," Aurora said. "I almost wish—"

"What?" Ross said. "That you didn't want to be a movie star so bad?"

She pushed back her chair.

"Let's go, Ross. I'm awfully tired . . ."

And in another month, the creature in the sound stage of Cosmic Studios was a terrifying twenty feet tall, and Robby, its guardian, had learned to respect its raking claws and snapping teeth. He no longer chatted amiably to the beast, and no longer al-

lowed himself more than thirty feet near the end of its forged steel chains. The monster's trainer visited the cage every day, and Robby always looked relieved to see Ross O'Brien's confident figure in the doorway of Stage Four.

"You're not getting afraid of it, Robby?" The hunter looked at the youth's strained features.

"Who, me? No, sir, Mr. O'Brien."

"Well, be afraid then. It helps. And if you ever really have trouble with the creature, remember what I told you. The oxygen rifle, and shoot for the head. It's no use using the gas—it would take too long to have any effect. It must be quick."

"Gosh, Mr. O'Brien—Mr. Thurston said—"

"Said what?"

"Well, the beast's important to the studio. Mr. Thurston made a big point out of it—said I'd lose my job if anything happened. And you know how things have been, Mr. O'Brien. Jobs don't grow on trees these days."

Ross's face tightened. "Never mind that. Just don't get foolhardy. If the lizard ever finds its way out of those chains—shoot for the head. All right?"

"Sure, Mr. O'Brien." But Robby's eyes were dubious.

In three months, the creature was thirty feet high, and its angry bellows penetrated even the thick walls of the sound stage, to spread wonderment and consternation among the movie people at Cosmic Studios.

One morning, the hunter confronted Leo Gower in his plush office and said:

"Look, Mr. Gower. It's about time we started thinking of transporting the goofus east. Before it gets too big to make the trip."

"Don't let it bother you," Gower said coolly. "I've got it all planned. We have a special box car, on our own studio train, all ready to take the beast to New York."

"And how do you hide a thing that size?"

"That's all figured out, too. I've got a private estate in a town called Meadows, about twenty miles outside of White Plains. We'll ship the goofus to the railway junction there when we're ready to get started."

"I don't like it," Ross said flatly. "I think you're taking too many chances. How do you know this crazy gas of Dr. Steiner's will work? How can you freeze a big city like

New York from the rest of the world?"

Gower chuckled suddenly. "Guess you're not keeping track of the plans, O'Brien. We abandoned that suspended animation stuff six weeks ago, at one of the story conferences. We've got a much better idea, less expensive, and more rewarding."

"What's that?"

"The direct approach. We are just going to turn the beast loose and make sure our cameras get in on all the action."

"Turn him loose? You can't do it that way—"

"Sure we can. We'll see that nobody gets hurt. We'll carry plenty of those knock-out gas bombs everywhere we go, just in case the creature gets out of hand. And think of the mob scenes we'll get! It'll be a hell of a lot better than using extras. Cheaper too."

"You're crazy! They'll lock you up for turning that thing loose on the city!"

"No, they won't. Not the way we planned it. Cosmic Studios will just *happen* to be in New York at the time, doing an entirely different movie. Our camera crews will be johnny-on-the-spot when the goofus starts gallivanting."

"What about the city's own defense forces? The police? The National Guard?"

"Fine, fine," Gower chortled. "Let 'em do their best. Let 'em call out the Marines! By the time the city gets around to it, we'll have ten miles of hot pictures. Then they can move in all the defense forces they want. It'll make great action stuff. We can fill in the rest of the scenes we need here in Hollywood. By that time, the publicity will be sensational—we'll get a world-wide welcome for *Monster in Manhattan!*"

Ross shook his head. "And you think you'll get away with all this?"

"Why not?" Gower chuckled, and picked up a folded movie magazine from his desk. "And speaking of publicity—did you get a load of this?"

The hunter took it. The spread was dominated by a luscious color photo of Aurora Lee, wearing just about enough fabric to make a sail for a toy boat. The article was titled: **AURORA AND THE SPACE HUNTER.** Ross blinked when he saw the black-and-white photo of himself, a picture taken when he was a youth-

ful celebrity almost ten years ago.

"What the hell," he murmured.

He read the article and realized at once that it was linking him romantically with the movie queen. Seeing the brash words in cold print filled him with anger. He slammed the magazine back on the producer's desk and said: "Did you plant this garbage?"

"Who, me? Better talk to Aurora's press agent. But what harm can it do? That kind of thing makes box-office. And besides—" He rubbed his thick hand over the glossy page. "You oughta be flattered. I wouldn't mind a prize like that in my trophy room . . ."

The anger inside the hunter bubbled to the surface. There might have been physical violence committed on the person of Leo Gower, if the telephone hadn't interrupted sharply. The movie man picked it up, and barked: "What is it?"

His face changed abruptly at the first words that crackled tensely over the receiver.

"O'Brien!" he said. The hunter paused at the doorway. "Trouble on Stage Four—"

"What?"

"We better get over there. The goofus is acting up—"

There was more than trouble on Stage Four. There was destruction, and there was death.

The building was encircled by curious studio workers when Gower and the hunter arrived. The studio police cleared a path for them to the door, where they clearly heard the ominous thudding and thrashing that proved the beast was loose from its shackles.

"It's broken free," Ross said to Gower, a muscle twitching in his face. "I hope Robby got out in time—"

"Clear the area!" Gower shouted. "Everybody out of here!" He waved authoritatively at the studio guards, and they began pushing the curious employees from the scene. Then he looked at the hunter and said: "We've got to be careful. We don't want anybody in there but us."

"Nobody's getting in there. Not unless they want to be crushed. It sounds like the creature's right at the door, and there's no other way in." His eyes traveled upwards. "Except the skylight, maybe. If I could get to the roof with some of those gas bombs—"

"I'll call out the company

fire department. I'll get 'em to rush their ladder equipment over."

They listened to the muffled bellow of the creature from Mars, as it pounded its great body ceaselessly against the resisting concrete.

"I hope Robby's okay," Ross O'Brien said.

But he wasn't. When the creature had been subdued by the bombs hurled from the skylight of the converted studio, Ross, Gower, and Thurston entered to find the youth's crushed body. He looked like a marionette flung heedlessly into the corner of the room by some cruel puppeteer. There was an oxygen rifle a few feet away from the broken body.

Ross picked it up. "No shot's been fired. He didn't listen to me; he was afraid to kill the beast. That's your doing, Thurston."

"Nuts," Gower's assistant said. "Robby knew the risks when he took the assignment."

"We've got to cover it up," Gower said. "Make it look like an accident. Say he was killed by a fall. If this story gets out before the shooting date—"

Ross felt sick. He started for the door, but Gower's flat, harsh voice stopped him.

"Wait a minute, O'Brien. You were asking me about transporting the goofus east. Well, I think the time's ripe. The sooner we get it out of Hollywood, the better."

"No! You can count me out of the deal, Gower. I won't go through with it; not after this."

"Maybe you didn't understand," Thurston said unpleasantly. "This business about your wife on Mercury, about Amelia. We weren't kidding. We've got a sworn statement from a member of your expedition, attesting that you killed her. Even if the courts won't re-open the case, the story'll smear you good. You'll be begging for scraps on the street—"

In one motion, the hunter turned on the balls of his feet and directed a looping fist in the direction of Jock Thurston's jaw. It landed squarely, with a satisfying crunch of bone. Gower's assistant looked blank, and then crumpled to the floor.

Gower looked down at Thurston without emotion.

"That was stupid," he said coldly. "Be smart and cooperate with us, O'Brien. You've got as much to gain as we do. You play along with us until the picture's in the can, I'll guarantee you a salary

with Cosmic for the next five years. That should be pretty important to a guy with thoughts of—settling down."

Ross's fists were still clenched, but Gower's words struck home. His features softened, and he said:

"All right. But I want to be around when the goofus is turned loose. I don't want more murders on my conscience."

He looked at Robby pityingly once more, and then just as pityingly, turned his eyes on the unconscious creature from the red planet.

Then he went out, his shoulders a little stooped.

The first days of Spring assaulted the island of Manhattan with summer temperatures. The sudden heat brought a burst of greenery to the parks that lined the rivers. The Hudson River, moving slowly to its rendezvous with the Atlantic, sparkled brilliantly in the sun.

In his hotel room overlooking New York's west side, Ross O'Brien of Pittsburgh, of Mercury, of Mars, and late of Hollywood, groaned his way out of an unpleasant dream and sat up in bed.

At first, he thought his depressed mood was occasioned

by the dream. Then he remembered what day it was.

He went to the window and yanked at the cord of the venetian blind. The sunlit river hurt his eyes. The traffic was moving slowly, lazily on the West Side Highway. There were people in summer clothing ambling up Riverside Drive, wheeling baby carriages, strolling in pairs, relaxing on benches. There was a summery tranquillity in the air.

It was a day of peace, but it was calculated to be a day of horror.

Yesterday, he had left Leo Gower's rambling estate in Meadows, New York and taken one last look at the monster he had helped bring to the city. The goofus was full grown now, and grown to a magnitude that rivalled the most fantastic of the creatures on Mars. Well over three hundred feet tall, and grown huge on the never-failing supply of beef that its captors provided, it had seemed capable of such devastation that Ross shuddered when he pictured the beast in rampage.

Gower had sworn that no human life would be endangered—that his camera crewmen would be abetted by a crew of riflemen, ready to do

away with the beast if life were threatened. But Leo Gower's promises couldn't always be reconciled with his deeds, and Ross O'Brien was worried.

The telephone rang.

"Ross?" Aurora Lee's voice had an anxious edge. "Ross I've got to see you right away."

"It's a bad time, honey. Zero hour is almost here."

"I don't care about that. I don't want to be stuck on the other side of town when it happens. I want to be with you, Ross."

The hunter frowned. Leo Gower had stationed the film's leading lady in an East Side hotel, as far from the scene of the expected action as possible. But now he didn't feel like heeding Gower's precautions.

"Okay, come over as soon as you can. There's something I want to talk about, too."

She arrived in less than an hour, giving the hunter barely enough time to shave and dress. Her makeup was something less than perfect, and there was a disorder in her hair, but the effect was somehow more alluring than ever. They embraced at the door, and then Aurora broke from his arms and went to the

window. She turned troubled eyes on the calm waters of the Hudson.

"How will they do it?" she asked.

"They'll turn the beast loose up in Meadows this morning, knowing that it'll head for the first water-hole in sight. That'll be the upper Hudson, about half a mile away. Gower's riflemen will be on hand to make sure the creature gets herded in the right direction. When it hits the water, its natural inclination will be to head downstream, towards Manhattan. Gower's stationed crews all along the west side, ready with walkie-talkies to keep him informed about where the creature finally emerges. It can be anywhere, from the George Washington Bridge to South Shore. If it shows up too far upstream, they'll shoot at it and drive it back beneath the water."

She put her hands to her face. "How can they be sure? How do they know what the thing will do?"

"Because I told them," Ross said glumly.

Her hands were still at her face, and the hunter realized that they were covering tears. He came to her side and said:

"What is it, Aurora?"

"I'm frightened," Ross.

Gower and Jock—they were at my place last night, talking things over, celebrating. They drank a lot. They—said some awful things—"

"What do you mean?"

She uncovered moist, enlarged eyes. "Oh, Ross—they don't *really* care what happens to the city. They don't care if people get maimed or killed. They'd just as soon let it happen—for the sake of the movie—"

He gripped her shoulders. "What are you talking about? Gower promised—"

"It doesn't mean anything! He's determined to get good pictures, at any price. They won't try and stop the beast if it gets out of hand. They *want* to see people murdered. It's boxoffice!" Her voice rose shrilly.

Suddenly, the scene framed in the window of Ross O'Brien's hotel room seemed covered by a black shadow. Ross stared past the girl, and then his hand reached out for the telephone.

"We have to warn them," he said softly. "We have to tell the authorities what's going to happen."

"Ross, you can't! You know what they'll do. About what happened on Mercury—"

"That doesn't matter,

Aurora. I'll tell the police myself, tell them the truth. It'll be a relief. But we've got to stop them!"

There was nothing polite about the knock that came abruptly on Ross O'Brien's door. He put down the receiver and looked at the girl. "Did you tell anyone you were coming here?"

"Yes. The girl at the desk—"

The knock came again, and the knob turned with a quick twist.

"Sorry to barge in," Leo Gower said. He stepped into the room almost jauntily, a thin smile on his plump face. "I called your hotel, Aurora, and they told me you were over here. I thought I asked you to stay put today?"

"I didn't feel like it, Leo."

Ross said: "I didn't invite you in, Gower."

"Didn't you? Well, I'm in. Thought you'd like to know that I just spoke to Jock up in Meadows. Everything's gone like clockwork—they turned the creature loose at seven this morning, and it headed straight for the river without them having to fire a shot. You were right about that instinctive stuff, O'Brien."

The hunter grimaced, and

Gower shot a look at the bejewelled watch on his wrist.

"I figure the beast ought to make it downstream in another hour, maybe even less. Thought maybe you'd like to join me at the number one camera station, set up near Grant's Tomb. We'll be getting messages from the guys who spot the goofus when it finally comes up for air."

"Sure," Ross said. "I'll be happy to join you. Only there's something I have to do first."

"Ross!" Aurora looked frightened.

He picked up the telephone again.

"Give me the police—"

"*O'Brien!*" The producer sprung forward with astonishing agility, plucking the phone from Ross's grasp and slamming it viciously to its cradle.

"It's no good, Gower," the hunter said. "You can do what you like about the Mercury business. But I'm going to warn the city before that thing is turned loose."

"You're not warning anybody!" The plump hand dug into the producer's jacket, and came out in possession of a small flat automatic. He pushed the muzzle savagely against Ross's side, and

barked: "Get away from the phone!"

The hunter laughed. "You are out of character, Gower. Leave that kind of thing to your movie villains."

"I've been carrying this thing for my own protection, ever since we started playing footsie with the goofus. But it can also protect me against guys like you, O'Brien."

Aurora came to clutch Ross's arm. "He means it, Ross. Be careful—"

He shook her off angrily. "Who's side are you on?" He picked up the telephone once more, ignoring Gower's glare. "Operator—I still want to make that call. To the police—"

The butt end of Gower's small flat automatic was harder than it looked, or else there was more strength in the producer's flabby arm than Ross would have reckoned on. The gun crashed on the back of the hunter's head, but before he could feel the pain of the blow an overwhelming tide of light swept him into oblivion.

He awoke to the screams of women.

The sound invaded the comfortable unconsciousness that had momentarily removed him from the problems

and decisions he had to face. He regretted the awakening, particularly when it brought with it the first sharp pangs of pain from the bleeding wound on his head.

He struggled to his feet and saw that the apartment was empty. Wherever Gower had gone, Aurora had gone with him.

Finally, he realized that the screams were not the tag ends of a delirious dream. They were real, from real throats, and they were coming through his opened window.

He staggered towards the glass, clutching at the dangling cords of the venetian blind for support.

He saw bewildered people, moving directionlessly along the river drive. There were cars stalled on the highway, and the clanging of fire trucks. There was panic as far as his eyes could see, yet the object of all the sudden fear was actually some two miles away, an object terrifying in the midst of the ordered city life.

It was the goofus, rising its incredible height out of the waters of the Hudson, opening its great jaws to roar defiance at the tiny creatures who trembled at its sight.

Ross whirled and headed out of the apartment. The

creature seemed to have chosen a site near the mid-town area of Manhattan to lift itself from the river bed. Not even Leo Gower could have planned it better.

There was a cab in front of the hotel, its driver standing outside, gaping at the fleeing crowds and scratching his head in puzzlement.

Ross hopped into the rear. "Let's go, let's go!" he shouted. "Down to Forty-second Street, as near to the river as you can get!"

"What the hell's going on?"

"You'll find out more where we're going. But let's go!"

The driver shrugged, and climbed behind the wheel.

The traffic problems became acute the further downtown they traveled. At Forty-fourth Street, the hunter spotted a Cosmic Studios mobile unit stuck at a cross-street, and yelled to the driver to pull up. He threw a bill in his lap, and raced between the stalled cars to the studio truck.

"Gower!" he shouted to the driver. "Where's Leo Gower?"

"I dunno, Mr. O'Brien. I think he's on the dock—"

Ross looked over the thickening mass of autos, and decided that his legs would get him there faster. He broke

into a run, heading for the pier at Forty-second Street.

Despite the panic inspired by the beast rising from the river, the curious were still forming heavy crowds on the pier from which the Hudson River sightseeing boats weighed anchors. He pushed and shoved and fought his way through the mob, to finally spot the bulky form of Leo Gower, surrounded by a busy camera crew. Thurston was there, too, looking happy and excited, and Aurora Lee was by his side, looking pale and miserable.

"*Gower!*" he shouted, and hurled himself at the producer like a human missile.

The fat man tumbled over at the impact, and a dozen hands moved in to separate the hunter from him.

"He's crazy!" Gower said, panting. "A lunatic! Keep him away from me! Hold him back!"

"Look!"

It was Thurston's voice, and Thurston's finger that pointed towards the thing in the river.

The creature from Mars was rising full out of the water now, spraying the glistening drops for half a mile around him.

"Here he comes!"

"Keep shooting, for God's sake! Shoot! Shoot!"

Aurora came to Ross's side, throwing her arms about him and sobbing openly.

It had raised itself over a hundred feet over the water, its great talons waving in the air, its rows of jagged teeth shining in the Spring sun. Its huge eyes fixed on the people on the pier.

Then it splashed a claw into the water, sending a shower some twenty feet high. Its expression altered strangely, its jaws clicking closed. It splashed a claw again, and its jaws parted as if in appreciation of the effect.

"What the hell!" Gower said.

"What's the damn thing doing?" Thurston said.

They watched, and they saw the creature from Mars drop back beneath the river. Its sudden disappearance brought a gasp from the crowd, until the head appeared once more.

Then its feet appeared.

The monster was floating. It was kicking its feet in the water, creating geysers. Its jaws opened and an unearthly growl emerged from its throat; a growl unmistakable in the emotion it expressed.

"Ross—it's enjoying itself."

"Thurston!" Gower's face went red. "Fire a shot towards the beast—a salvo! We've got to stir it up before the whole damned U. S. Army gets here!"

Thurston snapped orders to the waiting riflemen on the pier. They lifted their oxygen weapons in the air, silencers off, and sent a barrage exploding and echoing over the water.

The monster looked interested, but not half as much as he was in the pleasure of bathing.

Ross began to laugh. He laughed so hard that Aurora broke her hold on him and watched him in amazement. "What is it?" the girl asked.

"The monster! It's been domesticated—it doesn't even know *how* to go on a rampage! The damn thing's tame, Aurora. It's tame!"

"I don't think we'll need the police so much," Ross chuckled. "I think we'd be better off calling the Bronx Zoo. It'll be expensive on the upkeep—but think of the crowds it'll attract!"

"Come on, Aurora. Let's go look for some real excitement. Let's go to a movie."

Behind them, the monster in Manhattan chortled and gamboled happily in the waters of the Hudson. **THE END**

LOOK-ALIKE ARMY

By G. L. VANDENBURG

It was the most fantastic invasion strategy ever devised. Naturally, it took the fantastic mistake in cosmic history to defeat it.

THE phone rang for Dewey Fraser. It was Harrison at the *Chronicle* with no greeting and five words, "Get the hell down here!"

Dewey hung up and threw down his hand. "There's one thing worse than being interrupted in the middle of a poker game and that's a kibitzer on a hot date!" The four reporters grunted in sympathy and went on with the game.

Andrew Harrison was not the blustering, stop-the-presses type editor invented by the movie mills. He let other people get excited. He smiled when he called you a louse. Everybody liked him.

"Fella named Johnson, lives on the top floor at . . . ah . . ." the editor checked a slip of paper, "723 West 114th Street.

Says the guy in the room next to him is receiving radio signals that would curl a dog's ears. Thinks this guy might be a Soviet agent. Worth looking into."

Dewey pulled his feet from the editor's desk. His face was sour. "Andy, did you drag me out of a poker game just to go talk to a crackpot?"

"I'm sorry there doesn't happen to be a war going on at the moment. We need you on the home front." Harrison calmly checked his notes again. "There's another angle to it. This Johnson fella says it's an ultra-high frequency signal, like no sound he's ever heard on Earth."

"How many sounds has he heard off Earth?"

Harrison ignored the flippancy, "I talked with him my-



The work was tiring but the hours were good.

self. He put the phone next to his wall. Whatever it was sounded strange to me, too."

"There must be somebody in classified who isn't busy. This paper isn't that successful." One look at Andrew Harrison's benign smile told Dewey he was about to be canned. "Okay, okay, Andy, I'll go. But I think you're getting a little old to be falling for a gag like this." He opened the editor's door. "If it's a real crazy sound maybe we can bottle it and sell it." He shut the door before he could catch Harrison's reaction.

Dewey sat on the subway, bored, reading the morning competition, the *Telegraph*. In ten years of beating the bushes for a decent story how many phonies had he flushed out? It seemed like a thousand. He chuckled to himself. He could detect a phoney quicker than Mantle could spot a fat pitch.

He got off at 110th Street and walked to Riverside Drive. At 11 A.M. the Drive was quiet save for a few kids playing on the sidewalk and a man sitting on a bench at 112th Street. The man looked vaguely familiar to Dewey. It bothered the reporter as he continued to his destination. He had only glanced at the

man but there was something about his face. Something that a sixth sense told Dewey was newsworthy. But he did not know what it was.

He reached 114th Street before it dawned on him. It was almost too good to be true. Too strange to believe. The man sitting on the bench, he was certain, was Malcolm Kane, the noted Shakespearian actor who had disappeared mysteriously over a year before.

Dewey forgot about his assignment. He turned and ran back toward the bench. It was empty. A quick look around and he saw the man turning the corner of 110th Street. Dewey's legs never carried him faster. They almost screeched going around the corner. He came to a halt. The man was nowhere in sight. At the rate he'd been walking the man couldn't have passed more than one building before Dewey got to the corner. A quick check with the super of the first building brought negative results.

Dewey jammed a smoke into his mouth. A good story gone to pot. Now he would have to go and listen to some character who, more than likely, would expect a reward for uncovering espionage that didn't exist. . . .

"The man's name is David Whitman. He *calls* himself a professor," Ernest Johnson said, pursing his lips. Johnson was a little toothpick of a man with curly brown hair and wild dark eyes. He could probably flutter those eyes and bury a knife in someone's ribs without ever missing a blink. Dewey had him pegged the minute he opened his mouth.

"My boss told me the nature of your call, Mr. Johnson, but I've forgotten it. Refresh me."

"How could you forget something so urgent!" Johnson's eyes squinted resentfully. "This so-called professor is probably a Russian spy!"

"They're the most interesting kind."

"Listen!" Johnson cupped his ear. Dewey expected to see him pose on one leg like a nymph. "Hear those signals? They've been going steadily. First they're soft and then they grow louder."

Dewey listened. It was a multiple signal. At first it was rhythmic, like a person humming; then more like a thrush warbling; finally it sounded something like those two chipmunks in the Walt Disney cartoons.

"There's probably a very simple explanation to it, Mr.

Johnson. I think you've allowed your imagination to . . ."

"Well, I think it is your duty as a newspaperman to go down and investigate. You can never tell. Suppose those signals are coming from the upper stratosphere! That's another theory I have."

Dewey went into the hall and approached the room. The door was ajar. Except for electrical equipment, newspapers, benches, a swivel chair, six orange crates, a sink full of dirty dishes and at least two tons of dust, the room was empty.

There were so many different radios it was difficult to tell just which one the signal was coming in on. Dewey found several outlets in the wall. None had plugs in them. The signal grew stronger.

Dewey found the receiver. It was a tiny thing about the size of a Dick Tracy wrist watch radio. The signal was being transmitted at a frequency close to five hundred thousand megacycles. He did not need a course in electronics to know that was higher than anything he'd ever heard.

A hand clamped itself on his shoulder and flung him around. He dropped the radio and raised his own hands in defense.

"How dare you enter this room!" the professor's guttural tones almost drowned out the signal. He spoke with a slight continental accent. "You have no right invading a man's privacy! Who are you?"

Dewey made an effort to explain but the angry white-haired professor interrupted him. "Ah!" he said, "that idiot down the hall! He's always prying into other people's work! Now he brings a reporter! What is he trying to do to me?"

"Professor, your small radio with the signal coming from it. Is it a transistor job? It isn't plugged in anywhere and I was won . . ."

"I'll give you one minute to leave the premises before I call the police!"

"If your radio is a new invention there might be a story in it. Maybe even page one. You'd have your picture in the paper. You'd be famous,"

"I have no desire for publicity. Now get out! Out!" His eyes were wild with rage. He reached for the phone.

Dewey shrugged. If there was a story here it wasn't worth all the trouble. Besides, he couldn't get Malcolm Kane out of his mind. He left the room and went to the stairs. On his way he caught sight of

Mr. Johnson's head peeking around his doorway.

"Boo!" Dewey yelled. And Ernest Johnson leapt back into his room like a gazelle. . . .

He deposited two nickels and dialed the *Chronicle*. "Alice, give me Andy Harrison. It's Dewey."

He couldn't have cared less about David Whitman or his radio or his nosy neighbors. That missing actor kept popping back into his mind. He could still see Malcolm Kane sitting on the park bench.

"Dewey, where the hell have you been?" Harrison's voice came over the wire.

"I'm phoning that lousy 'sound' story in, Andy. There's nothing to it, anyway. I've got something for you that'll scoop the country. . . ."

"Forget it," Harrison sounded more urgent than usual. "I have another assignment for you. Get a pencil and paper."

"Andy, will you listen to me? I saw Malcolm Kane! You know, that big actor who disappeared . . ."

"You what?" Harrison exploded.

"Yeah, he was at Riverside and 112th Street . . ."

"Good boy, Dewey! That's the assignment I was just going to give you! Fifteen other

people reported seeing him this morning . . . all in different parts of town. His name's been popping up like an epidemic. I sent three guys out to check witnesses. But you saw him! Did you talk with him? What did he say? Where is he now? Do you have a story? Come on, out with it. What about . . ."

"Will you shut up a minute and listen!" Dewey blasted into the mouthpiece. "He got away before I realized who he was. I never said one word to him. But it *was* him, I'm sure of it."

"Of course, it was him, you idiot! Fifteen other people can't all go nuts in one morning. How the hell could you let a guy like that out of your sight?"

"Andy, I didn't exactly . . ."

"Never mind, never mind! Take down these names and addresses. If we got fifteen calls you can bet your bottom buck every other paper in town got just as many. I want a story on this pronto, understand?"

Dewey studied the list of names. Under ordinary circumstances he would have thought that fifteen unfortunates had lost their marbles. But this situation wasn't ordinary. He had seen Malcolm Kane himself. And he was

damn sure Dewey Fraser's marbles weren't missing. He left the telephone booth. Destination: Yonkers. . . .

The gas station was on the Post Road. Samuel Mason, the proprietor, carried his two hundred and fifty pounds with the casual grace of an acrobat. He had a permanent smile and two ripe tomatoes for cheeks. The only hair he owned rested just above his eyes.

"There wasn't any mistake about it, Mr. Fraser," he said with great assurance. "I saw Malcolm Kane. I'd know him anywhere. My wife and I are regular theatergoers. We've seen him many times. Always liked him, too."

"Exactly where did you see him, Mr. Mason?"

"Why, he walked right past the station."

"You mean he was walking on the Post Road?"

"It seemed strange to me, too," Mr. Mason chuckled. "Anyhow, I was attending to a customer and I saw this fellow walk by. He got my attention right away because of the way he was dressed."

"Something wrong with the way he was dressed?"

"Nothing wrong exactly, but you almost never see a fellow walking along the Post Road dressed as spiffy as he

was. He looked like he should have been driving a Cadillac. Had on a charcoal gray suit. Plenty expensive, too. A black velvet Alpine hat with a small feather and . . . ah . . . let's see . . ." he pondered a moment. "I'm pretty sure it was a green tie and a fresh shirt with a wide collar. Oh, and he carried a walking stick. Most expensive-looking thing I ever saw." He beamed, proud of his observational talents.

"A walking stick? Did he seem to be lame or was that just part of the attire?"

"Just part of the outfit," Mason said matter-of-factly. "Tell you the truth I don't think he'd have looked the same without it. It was that classy."

"What did you do when you saw him?"

"Well, like I said, the minute I looked up I knew it was him. I guess I got a little excited inside. I wanted to run right out and ask him for his autograph. But I waited until I was through servicing the customer . . . customer is always more important with me . . . then I yelled after him. But he was already around the corner by then."

"Didn't you go around the corner to see if you could catch up with him?"

"I was too late. By the time

I got to the corner he was nowhere in sight. That was another strange thing. Around that corner," he pointed toward a billboard which blocked the view beyond, "there's a half-mile stretch of open space. I can't imagine where the devil he disappeared to."

"What time did you see Malcolm Kane?"

"About eight o'clock this morning."

Dewey pushed his hat to the back of his head. "A missing celebrity taking a stroll on the Post Road in Yonkers at eight o'clock in the morning! It beats the hell out of me!" He paused a moment, then asked, "Was Mr. Kane doing anything as he went by? I mean did he look all right? Was there any indication that he might be in a state of amnesia? Could you tell anything peculiar about him?"

The gas station owner took time to think. His observational powers had chalked up a zero on that score and it troubled him. "Nooo," he uttered haltingly, "not that I can recall. He didn't look my way. Just kept right on looking straight ahead. As far as I could tell he was in pretty good spirits. He walked right on by humming away . . ."

"Humming?"

"That's what it sounded like."

"Do you mind if I use your phone, Mr. Mason?"

"Not as long as you got a dime."

Dewey deposited two nickels.

"Get me Salinger in the morgue," he said to the girl at the *Chronicle* switchboard. He glanced over the notes he had taken. They made no sense to him. He was almost certain that, after seeing Kane himself, he would have described his clothing exactly as Mason had. And come to think of it wasn't there a walking stick leaning beside Malcolm Kane when he'd seen him on the bench at 112th Street? He wouldn't have bet on it. "Salinger, this is Dewey Fraser. Find out the day Malcolm Kane disappeared and see if there's a description somewhere of what he was wearing the last time anyone saw him."

He waited as Salinger went to get the information. When the keeper of the morgue picked up the phone again he read excerpts from the reports of Kane's disappearance. The last time anyone had seen the actor over a year ago he had been wearing a charcoal gray suit, white shirt, green tie and

black velvet Alpine hat with feather. The same clothes he was wearing when Dewey saw him and when Mason saw him. It had to mean something. But at the moment it didn't. Dewey waved a hasty good-bye to Mason and hopped into the *Chronicle's* car.

Destination: Sunnyside, Queens. . . .

Matilda Tatman, age fifty-three, ran a newspaper stand on a corner that, for her sake, could have used a few more pedestrians. She was a tiny woman, weighing at least ninety pounds, with an ugly face and a disposition to match. Words streamed from her tight mouth like water from a syringe. She smiled only once during the interview, when Dewey offered to buy her a drink. Her eyes lit up. When she thanked him he could have leaned against her bonded breath.

She talked for a half hour and said two minutes' worth. She had seen Malcolm Kane walking along the sidewalk in Sunnyside. That had been at ten minutes after ten. Her description was identical to Mason's. He had walked by, looking straight ahead, humming to himself. Or was it whistling? She wasn't sure.

"If I could remember the

tune I'm sure I could tell you whether it was a whistle or a hum. Oh, did I mention the walking stick?" she asked. "Ornate thing, it was. Made him look so aristocratic. But wait now and let me see if I can get that tune. . . ."

"Yes, well, thank you very much, Mrs. Tatman. You've been a great help anyway." He gave her a dollar and apologized for not being able to join her for the drink.

He sat in the car and stared at his notes. Both witnesses so far had reported that Kane had been humming . . . or whistling. In Yonkers at eight A.M. and in Sunnyside at ten minutes after ten. Strange, but not inconceivable. Dewey was sure that Kane had not been humming nor emitting any other sound when he had seen him at 112th Street at ten-thirty.

Wait a minute, he said to himself, how the hell did Kane get from Sunnyside, Queens, all the way to Manhattan's west side in twenty minutes!

He stepped on the gas and sped off in search of his third witness, Miss Sally Morgan, a gorgeous young actress, who lived on West 110th Street off Amsterdam Avenue. . . .

She opened the door as if she expected to be greeted by

a corps of photographers. The sight of Dewey Fraser in wrinkled gray tweeds was something of a comedown. She leaned against the door, crossed her feet and sighed. But when he introduced himself she greeted him cheerfully.

"Oh! Do come in, Mr. Fraser. I never thought they'd send a reporter," she said with mock modesty.

"Thank you," Dewey replied as she closed the door behind him. "According to the report I have you saw this Malcolm . . ."

Dewey got no further. He was suddenly whirled around. Two arms encircled his neck and held it in a vise-like grip. Something attached itself to his whole body and clung like a hot magnet. Two soft moist lips found his mouth and stayed there until it seemed they would ignite.

She drew away from him. Dewey groped for a chair.

"Timber!" he said. The word was barely audible.

"I hope you don't mind." She sounded apologetic.

"Are you kidding?"

"I just wanted to find out something. Do you think I'm losing my touch?" There was just a pinch of indignation in her voice.

"I hope not. I'd hate to

think of what you were like before."

"Then Malcolm Kane is sure losing his."

"What!"

"After I saw him on the street earlier he must have followed me or something. Anyway, I was sitting here having breakfast and there was a knock on the door. It was him."

"Are you an old friend of his?"

"No, but believe me," she said, doing her best to be believed, "If anyone would know Malcolm Kane I would. There is no doubt about that."

"Why?"

She shrugged. "I worked with him in five shows."

"What happened when he came to the door?"

"Well, you know he used to have quite a reputation with the girls. I knew he'd been missing but I figured he'd just kind of come back suddenly and maybe he was doing a new show. He might have gotten my phone number somehow and decided to make a personal call about casting. I've had dealings with that kind before so I invited him in and decided to play along with his little game. Up to a point, you understand. But he never did a thing. He never even said anything, just sat

there in that armchair and looked me over."

"What did you do?"

"I tried to move to the chair but whenever I got near him he drew away. I figured one of us was losing the old touch. I just wanted to be sure it wasn't me."

"Did he stay very long?"

"About ten minutes."

"Where did you see him the first time?"

"Right around the corner on Amsterdam Avenue." Her confidence recaptured, Miss Morgan assumed a vamp-like pose on the sofa twenty feet across the room.

"What time?"

"About ten-forty-five."

Dewey scratched the back of his head. "In a way that figures. In another way it doesn't. I saw him at Riverside and 110th at ten-thirty."

"Oh, do you live around here?" In a single movement she was off the couch and sitting in an easy chair three feet away from him. "I wasn't aware there were any newspaper men living in the neighborhood." She let one leg droop over the arm of the chair.

Dewey hadn't detected any hand movement on her part but somehow another button on her blouse had come un-

done. It was as though she were grateful to him for restoring her "touch."

He appreciated both her beauty and her inclinations. But he decided he'd better have done with the questions and get out of there fast before he lost control of himself and goofed the best story he'd found in five years.

"What do you remember about him, Miss Morgan? What was he doing, which way was he going, his clothes, anything?"

"I love newspaper men!" The words wafted out of her delicious mouth and gently exploded in the middle of the room.

Dewey unloosened his tie and chewed on his pencil. "I'll take you on a tour of the *Chronicle* sometime," he panted. "Now about Malcolm Kane . . ."

She told him. Reluctantly. Her story was the same. When she saw him outside he was headed downtown. It seemed to her that he kept looking in front of him, just the way he did in the apartment. Clothing? Charcoal gray suit, clean white shirt, green tie, black velvet Alpine hat, plain black loafers, forest green socks, ornate cuff links, garters. Miss Morgan hadn't missed a trick.

She had an afterthought. "Oh, and that walking stick. Classiest thing I'd ever seen. I didn't notice it outside, but here in the apartment where it's pretty dark," she tried to blush and failed, "it had kind of a glow to it. It was very beautiful."

"One other thing, Miss Morgan."

"Only one other thing, Mr. Fraser?" Every syllable had a seductive bend in it."

Dewey backed off toward the door, cursing the fates for bringing Malcolm Kane and this package of sex into his life on the same day. "Just one," he reiterated. "Was Mr. Kane by any chance humming when you saw him?"

"Well, what do you know about that? I forgot to mention that weird humming, didn't I? How did you know about it?"

"I get around a lot. What did it sound like to you?"

"Sounded kind of cozy to me." She smiled. Her lips looked inviting again. "Like a kitten purring and a bird chirping. Kind of a duet if that makes any sense. Does that sound right to you?"

"It doesn't. But don't worry about it. Nothing much does today." Dewey opened the door.

"You're not leaving, are

you?" She bounded out of the chair and went to his side.

He put up his fingers like a Boy Scout. "A *Chronicle* reporter always gets his man."

"Hooray." There was an unmistakable sarcasm in her voice.

He weakened. "But I might have to come back. Would you mind staying at home today, Miss Morgan? You could be very helpful in case Malcolm Kane pays you a return visit." He moved into the hall.

"I'll be here," she said, slowly closing the door. . . .

In the ground floor hallway Dewey stopped to tighten his tie and mop his brow. There weren't many like Sally Morgan. And there wasn't any doubt in his mind that he wanted to see her again. But it would have to wait. This story was going to take a while. He realized that after talking with the first three witnesses.

He decided to look for the nearest cigar store and give Salinger at the morgue another buzz. It was important right now to find out whether Malcolm Kane was in the habit of using a walking stick.

He walked down the hallway and grabbed the knob of the vestibule door. His eyes bulged as he saw the walking

stick. He looked up and saw Malcolm Kane putting his hand on the knob of the outside door. Dewey quickly drew back and waited for the actor to enter. His pulse began to beat faster. He couldn't figure out why.

Malcolm Kane opened the vestibule door. Dewey heard him humming merrily as he made his way to the stairs. The reporter sidled up to him and took him by surprise as he tapped him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Kane, my name is Dewey Fraser. I'm a reporter from the *Chronicle*. . . ." After the blinding flash of light there were only billowing dark clouds and Dewey was out colder than a hopped-up icebox. . . .

He felt hands exploring his body. He opened his eyes and found Miss Morgan sitting next to him.

"You said you might come back," she whispered as she applied another cold towel to his splitting skull. "I'll bet you never thought you'd be in this condition. The super helped me get you back here."

Dewey reached up to see if his head was really there. "I know it's a foolish question," he tried to raise himself and the accelerated throbbing

made him wince, "but what happened?"

"I don't know, but the reporter from the *Chronicle* didn't get his man." She affected a documentary tone. "Malcolm Kane is still at large!"

"Wait a minute!" Dewey again had control of his faculties. "I know what happened!" He suddenly put his hands to his ears.

"What's the matter?"

"My ears are ringing. I think there are two little guys inside my head blowing whistles at each other. It aches like hell. Can't you hear it?"

Her answer was to lower her lips and press them against his. After a minute she asked, "Are they still there?"

"Yes. Thanks anyway." Dewey shook his head. "The walking stick, Sally. It's really a gun. Don't ask me what kind because I don't know yet. All I remember is when I spoke to him he turned and the walking stick rose to a horizontal position and . . . pow!"

"He couldn't have shot you. No bullet holes. I checked."

"No, it wasn't that kind of a gun. I remember two things. That humming sound that seemed to intensify a thousand times when I spoke to

him. And a flash of light that came from the walking stick." He stood up. "Where's my hat?"

"You're not leaving again?"

"I sure am, honey. Old Malcolm Kane only put Dewey down. He didn't put him out. I know a hell of a lot more now than I knew before I got hit."

"Let me go with you, huh?"

"Not a chance. This time it might be too dangerous. Our friend Mr. Kane is playing for keeps."

"Please?" She looked at him with dreamy eyes. She could tell he would weaken in nothing flat. Her hands rippled under his lapels.

"You're taking advantage of a sick man," he pleaded.

"You've probably been thinking all this time that I'm kind of a loose character. I'm not. I'm really very hard to get. I just have no resistance to a good-looking man." The softer her voice became the weaker he got. "I've only known about two. You're the third."

"Yes, but . . ."

"I'll follow you anyway."

Dewey surrendered. "Okay, Sally Morgan, I guess you're old enough to know what you want." He paused not knowing whether he'd made a *faux pas*. "Fasten your safety belt and let's go."

"Where to first?"

"114th Street and Riverside Drive."

David Whitman's room was empty. Everything including the dust was gone. It was as clean as the Waldorf Ballroom. Dewey and Sally did what little searching they could do but the end result was frustration.

"I guess the Board of Health got here first," he cracked.

"There isn't even a stray wire hanging around."

"Johnson!" Dewey thought out loud.

"Who's Johnson?"

"Never mind. Come on." He raced down the hall and banged on Ernest Johnson's door. There was no answer.

Dewey was annoyed. He knew he was on the right track and yet here he found himself stymied at the first turn. How could all the stuff in that room have been cleared out in five hours? Maybe the landlord knew something.

The landlord turned out to be an immense landlady.

Dewey introduced himself and asked, "Where did Professor Whitman go?"

"Who's Professor Whitman?" The fat lady's jowls puffed out every time she said an "s."

"The guy who fiddled with the radios on the second floor. Where is he?"

"You got the wrong house, mister. Ain't nobody been in that room in over six months." She folded her short, stumpy arms and looked at Sally. "You two interested in a room maybe?"

"Look, lady, the *Chronicle* will be willing to pay you if you tell me Professor Whitman's forwarding address."

The fat lady grinned, "You are wasting your time, mister. I don't know nuthin'."

She was lying. Whitman had smelled a rat, packed up and left and must have paid her to keep her mouth shut. Everything about the place was the same except that room. Now there was no time to lose. He grabbed Sally's arm and took her to the car.

"Hey, where are we going now?" she asked breathlessly.

"We have a date with the mayor, honey." His voice was grim.

He stopped the car in front of a drug store on 110th Street. "Have to make two calls, then we'll be on our way." He got out of the car. Sally followed him.

"Would you mind telling me what's going on?" she asked as he fed the phone his last dime.

"It would take too long, honey, and it wouldn't make very much sense to you. You might even think I'd flipped." He waited for the switchboard operator to get Andrew Harrison. "Find me another dime, will you, Sally?"

Harrison's impatient voice invaded the wire. "What about it, Dewey? Have you got anything yet?"

"You bet your life I have. I want you to get to the City Hall on the double. I'm going to need you in case I have to be bailed out."

"What the hell are you talking about? What about the story?"

"The story is at City Hall. There's only one chance in a million that I'm wrong but if I'm right we're sitting on a powder keg and it's just a matter of time before it blows."

"What is it, Dewey?" Harrison was excited. "What the hell is it?"

"Not now, Andy. I'll see you in the mayor's office in twenty minutes." He hung up. Harrison would be furious but he'd be there.

Sally shoved a dime into his hand. He dialed the operator.

When the police sergeant answered the phone Dewey asked for the commissioner.

The sergeant gave him a hard time but Dewey bellowed into his ear that he was a newspaper man and that it was a grave emergency. Commissioner MacDonald picked up his phone.

"Commissioner, this is Dewey Fraser of the *Chronicle*. There's no time to explain very much but you'd better get forty or fifty men and yourself down to City Hall to the mayor's office right away. Don't waste a minute."

"What is this, a joke?"

"And it might be a good idea to assign men to every high official in the city. But the mayor is the most important right now."

"Now see here, I can't swamp the mayor's office . . ."

"You can if his life is in danger, Commissioner, and it is. Believe me, there's no time to lose. I'll be there myself. I'll explain it to you then."

When they reached the car again Sally was brimming over with excitement. "You're the dashingest thing I've seen in a long time," she oozed. "How do I get to be a newspaper girl?" She cuddled up next to him as he started the car.

"Sally, doll, if you knew what we were about to do you wouldn't give me a second thought. You'd beat it back to

the safety of that den of temptation you call an apartment."

"You don't know me very well. Try me and see."

As they whipped through the Central Park Highway Dewey yearned for everything to come out all right. He wanted to get to know Sally Morgan a lot better. He smiled inwardly thinking he'd be a damn fool if he didn't....

Fifty cops were gathered on the steps of City Hall. Commissioner MacDonald stood before them with his hands on his hips and his legs spread apart. He was glowering like a hungry bear.

Dewey and Sally got out of the car. Before going up the steps to see the commissioner Dewey nudged her.

"Look!" He pointed toward the other end of the wide City Hall steps.

"Look at what?" Sally asked.

"The walking stick. Our friend is still with us."

Sally gasped as she saw Malcolm Kane gracefully ascend the steps. He encountered no trouble with the police as he walked through the large double doors and into the building.

"Dewey! You must be clairvoyant! How did you know he'd be here?"

"Just a hunch . . . based on a few facts, of course. But what a hunch it's turning out to be." He pulled her by the arm, almost taking her off her feet. They raced up the steps to the waiting policemen.

"Commissioner, you'd better take your men up to the mayor's office right away."

"I want to know what the hell this is all about!" MacDonald scowled.

"It's about the mayor and most of the high officials in the city government being assassinated. Is that enough or do you want me to take valuable time to explain it to you?"

The commissioner, a hard-boiled ex-cop, looked Dewey squarely in the eye. "If this is a gag, Fraser, you're going to be a guest of the state for the next ten years." He swung into action. "Mulrooney! Thompson!"

Two lieutenants hustled forth.

"Take twenty men, Thompson, and cover every office in the building! Mulrooney, get another fifty men down here right away. Then join forces with Thompson. I'll take the rest of this group with me to the mayor's office."

Inside the building the men in blue spread in every direction.

Dewey and Sally stayed with the commissioner's contingent. They were all met at the mayor's reception room by Andrew Harrison.

Harrison took one look at the cops and yelled, "Dewey, what have you done? What the hell are all these policemen for?"

"Who are you?" the commissioner asked.

"He's my boss," Dewey cut in. "Andrew Harrison, the editor of the *Chronicle*. The newspaper that will expose the most fiendish plot in the history of this city."

The commissioner and Andrew Harrison both opened their mouths to say something but Dewey pushed them aside with, "This way, gentlemen!"

He opened the door to the mayor's spacious office. MacDonald, the score of policemen, Harrison and Sally all spilled into the room after him.

The office seemed normal and serene.

The commissioner's embarrassed voice reverberated throughout the office. "Fraser, what the hell . . ."

"Dewey, there's Malcolm Kane!" Sally shouted.

"I see him! Listen! He's humming to beat hell!"

The mayor was standing behind his desk. He was about

to shake hands with Malcolm Kane when the noisy congregation burst into his office. He turned angrily and caught sight of his police commissioner.

"MacDonald, what is the meaning of this?"

The walking stick slowly rose to a horizontal position.

"Mr. Mayor, I'm sorry, I . . . I . . . I . . ."

Dewey reached into the holster of one of the policemen. He pulled out the cop's gun and yelled, "Hit the floor, Mayor!"

The room resounded with a ferocious humming. Four shots cracked through the air. Two of them shattered the mayor's window, two thudded into Malcolm Kane. The hand that held the walking stick went limp but not before five policemen went down.

A couple of cops wrested the gun from Dewey. The office was a madhouse of shouting and confusion, people scurrying in every direction. The mayor crouched behind his desk waiting for the all clear. Sally went to Dewey's side. Harrison took notes. Conscious policemen were caring for unconscious policemen.

Commissioner MacDonald was yelling orders. He grab-

bed Dewey by his shirt front. "You're under arrest for murder, Fraser!"

Dewey turned to Harrison. "Andy, this is where I need you. You've got to back me up."

Harrison was fit to be tied. "Damn it, Dewey, the man is dead! The least you could do is tell us what this is all about!"

"Give him a chance, Commissioner," Sally begged.

"What the hell do you know about this? Who is this dame, anyway?"

Nobody had time to answer. Lieutenant Mulrooney stormed into the room out of breath. "Commissioner! Commissioner, three members of the city council have been murdered!"

"What!"

"You'd better come, sir."

MacDonald turned to the cops holding Dewey. "Keep him here until I get back."

The commissioner and Mulrooney moved to leave. They both froze in their tracks. The room was engulfed in silence. Everybody stared at the doorway.

Malcolm Kane, complete with walking stick, strolled into the room. He headed for the mayor. The walking stick came to a horizontal position as everyone in the room looked on in amazement at the

new Malcolm Kane and at the body on the floor. An incessant humming sound filled the room.

Dewey struggled like an animal in a net to free himself of the cops' grip.

It wasn't necessary. Commissioner MacDonald had seen enough. Only once did he tell Malcolm Kane to put down the walking stick. When Kane ignored him, MacDonald fired. The walking stick flew out of Kane's hand. His wrist gushed blood. It didn't even phase him. He picked up the walking stick as though he wasn't aware he'd been shot.

"In the head, MacDonald! Get him in the head!" Dewey warned.

MacDonald fired again. The second Malcolm Kane fell to the floor with a bullet in his temple. The humming slowly died out.

"All right, Fraser, what's the story?" the commissioner asked.

"Are you ready, Andy?" Dewey asked. Harrison had a pencil poised. "It isn't over yet but take this much down anyway."

"Shoot," said Harrison.

"Mulrooney!" the commissioner growled, "you take it down, too."

"First of all," Dewey be-

gan, "throw out the dragnet, Commissioner, for a Professor David Whitman. That may not be his real name but if your men can trace a radio signal they'll get him. The signal is on an ultra high frequency. About five hundred thousand megacycles. And it sounds like the humming noise you all heard coming out of the two Malcolm Kanes. Once you've located the frequency have your men jam the hell out of it."

"Why?"

"When they do the department will start getting reports that Malcolm Kane is dropping dead all over town. There's probably a couple of hundred of these things roaming around. They all look alike but none of them is the real Malcolm Kane. He's probably long dead. I ran into this Whitman character this morning and heard his radio receiving this signal. When I bumped into Malcolm Kane this afternoon he gave me a blast from whatever is planted in that stick. But before I went black I recognized the same signal that I had heard over Whitman's radio."

"Robots?" the commissioner asked incredulously.

"Better than that," Dewey replied. "Come on, take a look. Who has a knife?"

One of the policemen offered a small pocket knife.

"What are you going to do?" MacDonald had an uneasy look about him.

"It's a funny thing," Dewey said, "but I might not have arrived at this theory at all if it hadn't been for the little guy that lives next door to Whitman. He mentioned something about the upper stratosphere. By the time I pieced everything else together his words came back to me." Dewey plunged the knife into one of the Malcolm Kanes. He carved a neat square hole in the stomach as everyone in the room gasped and drew away. "Have a look, Commissioner."

MacDonald hesitated, then advanced to the body and looked into the hole at the wires, plastic and metal attachments that formed the insides. "I'll be damned!" he said. "What is it?"

"An android."

The commissioner put every man on the force on the Malcolm Kane case. In a matter of hours they located Professor David Whitman operating his radio from the back of an old storage van. It developed that he was the anchor man between a spaceship and the androids it had dispatched.

Once they captured his radio they had only to jam the frequency and, as Dewey predicted, the reports of Malcolm Kane's death started to roll in. Two hundred and twenty-five in all. . . .

MacDonald looked across his desk at Dewey and Sally. "Well, I still have a complete staff of men checking radio day and night, Fraser. There's no sign of that signal anywhere. Our 'visitors' must have called it quits and gone home." He took out a corona corona and sniffed it. "I wonder how long it'll be before they come back."

"One hell of a long time, Commissioner. You can put this visit down as a major defeat," said Dewey.

"What makes you think so?"

"The way I figure it, they came down at night about a year ago in Central Park. They made sure nobody saw them as they went into Kane's home on Fifth Avenue and snatched him. They took him back to where they come from and used him as a model. Their plan was to send a task force of these models, have

them knock off the high city officials and then move in and take over. By that time they'd have everyone in the city sufficiently frightened to put up any resistance."

"I don't get it." The commissioner chewed on his cigar. "I just don't get it! A civilization that has conquered space travel must be tremendously advanced. And yet they send in a task force of models and everyone of them looks alike. Why?"

Dewey smiled. "I thought about that, of course, and so far I've only been able to come to one conclusion."

"Which is?"

"The people, or creatures, or whatever they might be on the invaders' planet must all look alike. They therefore assumed, logically, that everyone on this planet must look like the man they stole to use for a model."

The commissioner threw up his hands in exasperation and reached into the bottom drawer of his desk for a snifter.

Dewey Fraser took Sally Morgan by the arm and escorted her out. They had a date.

THE END



THE PLAGUE BEARERS

By
HARLAN
ELLISON

Here's a rough, tough story of tomorrow's world written by one of the foremost rough, tough authors in the business. This yarn will take you by the throat and shake you around some, and when you've finished it, you'll say to yourself: Thank heaven it won't happen that way!

I CAME up behind the Screamie as he grabbed the girl, and shoved the bayonet into his neck. It was a rusty blade, and went in crookedly. I had to stick him again to finish the job. He fell, moaning and clutching at his streaming neck.

I kicked him under some rubble. The girl looked at me strangely for a minute—and the terror that had faded in her eyes as I pulled the Screamie off her, came back doubled—her eyes getting wider and wider; then she started to scream.

I bent down and slapped her across the face, as hard as I could. It almost didn't work. She began to slip sideways and her eyes began to glaze over. I grabbed her bare shoulder where the

sweater had been torn away, and shook her. The thick mat of her canary-yellow hair swirled about her face violently, and slowly her eyes began to come back to focus. Her mouth worked idly momentarily, as though she were building up pressure to speak. Then, "Like that, you—you k-killed him," she stuttered.

I looked over at the rubble pile. The Screamie was kicking his last as the bayonet-rips finished him. "He was a Screamie!" I snapped angrily, annoyed at having to defend myself, particularly after saving her life. She bit her full lips and looked at me with frightened intensity.

"Are you sure?" she asked quietly. There was a soft-edged hysteria in her tones.

I nodded. "Come here and



Desperately they turned their gun on the walking horror

look." I dragged her erect and pulled her over to the Screamie. He was now a corpse. I ripped his torn shirt completely off, and pointed with the bayonet. "Look," I said. The shirt hung from the tip of the bayonet . . . I wouldn't touch a Screamie for my place in Eternity.

She looked, and gagged.

His chest and stomach were covered with the eruptions. He was an advanced case—really bad shape. "He couldn't have gone on more than another two days, in any case," I added, dropping the shirt off the bayonet. I wiped the blade dry on his pants. "The bubbles were starting to erupt," I added, pointing.

Even death didn't stop their spread. As if to keynote my words, as we watched one of the pustules grew taut, swelled a bit in angry crimson, and split, spewing forth a thick stream of red-and-yellow excretion. Then the green.

The girl turned away, leaned against a charred timber, and vomited.

I took out a match and struck it on a bit of masonry. I set fire to the frayed cuffs of his pants, and his unruly hair. As he started to go up, I gave him another shove with my barracks boot, and

he rolled further under the rubble.

There's only one way to stop the Plague, even after a Screamie dies. Fire. The same way they did it in England, during the Middle Ages. The Black Death had been bad then, but it was nothing like the Plague. Nothing at all.

The Plague had killed off ninety per cent of the population of the Earth, in three months.

I didn't know whether I should thank God or the Devil that I was one of the few still alive.

"Come on," I said, hauling her after me, "let's get away from here. He may have friends." Her eyes were riveted to the curling wisps of smoke that were spiraling up from under the debris. The scent of burning flesh assailed our noses at the same instant, and she choked. I pulled her away without too much trouble.

She was too far into shock to argue with me. I shoved the bayonet through my belt and hurried back toward the Place, my arm around her.

I had to admit to myself, though, that saving her wasn't entirely altruistic. When your world has shattered around you, and only a

handful are left to grub for the necessities once considered commonplace; when every day is death and night brings death even more silently; when you are reduced to the state of an animal, a beautiful woman in danger is more than a challenge to your cavalier spirits.

As I felt the heat of her body under my hand, I realized just how far toward the animal state I had sunk in the last three months. But it was good to have her near me.

Night was falling. We hurried. It was even tougher with her dead weight.

The Place was an abandoned bomb egg in the center of the city. A few months before the Plague, the war had seemed to be the only thing to worry about. North America was on the verge of another holocaust with Ruskie-Chink, and the bomb egg manufacturers had done a record business. The one we called the Place was the pilot model of a new number they had just begun to manufacture. It had all the latest protective devices—a .750 cal. motor-driven gatling gun, scarf-mounted; independent food and air systems; impregnable walls—and it had

saved me from the marauding bands of Screamies.

Before, we had had to worry about the war . . . then one day, the war was unimportant. From nowhere had come the black lightning, filling the afternoon sky, and the scream of tortured air. Then the screaming was done, and the lightning had poured itself back into that hole in the sky from which it had come, and Earth was once more alone.

But now it was alone with the Plague.

Almost immediately it had begun, and people had died by the billions. No discrimination. Rich and poor, healthy and sick, white and black and yellow men. Death was all about and there seemed no escape.

Three months had done its work, and now—if what was left in America from the few ham radio reports, could be believed to be indicative of the situation elsewhere—only ten per cent of the world's population was left. It seemed to be leveling off. Strangely, many strong people had died, while those who appeared incapable of resisting a strong wind, had survived. There seemed to be a random factor of immunity.

I was one of those immune.

So was the Gimp. And apparently, so was this girl.

I could see how I might be immune; the Nordic giant type, with blond hair and broad shoulders and a head not too full of anything potent. I had been a filing clerk in an import-export firm before the Plague. Now I was one of the few animals who had survived the inexplicable death that had dropped from the sky. I could see how I might survive; I was big and strong. But how about the Gimp?

I lived in the Place with the Gimp. I'd found him a week after the Plague started, a week during which three million people had died—being attacked by a horde of people, in Rockefeller Plaza.

He had been wearing an army uniform. The people blamed the army and the scientists for the Plague . . . because they didn't know who else to blame. They thought Ruskie-Chink had thrown the Plague bombs, and they blamed the army for getting them into this. I saved him by charging in and howling. They had scattered, and I'd taken the Gimp back to the Place with me.

I could see how I might survive the Plague, but why

him? He was barely five feet tall, wizened like an apricot pit, with a circular bald spot at the back of his head. He had been a twenty year man in the army, wounded in Bizerte during the Second World War, and maintained as an orderly. I could see how a man like that would stay in the army—he had indeed found a home there. He was at a loss in the outside world. I cooked for him and helped him get around on his twisted left leg, and read to him. He was my constant companion for three months.

But it never ceased to amaze me that he had lived out the Plague. We lived together in the Place. And that was where I took the girl.

I locked the triple-locks on the port, and guided her down the ramp into the living room of the bomb egg. The Gimp was sewing buttons on his shirt—his only intact shirt—and looked up in terror as we stumped down. "Gimp," I said, "I want you to meet . . ." I realized I didn't know her name. I kept looking at her, hoping she'd fill it in, and I wasn't disappointed.

She hesitated a long instant, then said, warily, "Elyse Conning."

"Meet Miss Conning, Gimp.

Miss Conning, this is Walter Tripler, better known to all and sundry as the Gimp; my name is Terry Dexter. Welcome to the Sheraton-Astor."

She grinned, then, and we showed her around the bomb egg, a constant pleasure lighting the Gimp's eyes. It was good to have someone new around. Later that night, with the circuit-breaker warnings set about the Place, we lounged around and exchanged stories of post-Plague days. It seemed Elyse Conning's time had been a lot worse than ours.

"Then when they stormed the convent, I got away by dropping into the sewer. A man followed me for almost a mile, that time. I heard him drowning, though, as I was climbing out. It was horrible." Her face was white, her tones rough.

"I found a dead man with a rifle, and for almost a month I held out in an Automat, till a pair of stragglers from some organized bunch of looters got in, and I had to—had to—" her words died away, but I could see in her eyes what she meant. She had had to kill them both.

"So I ran away from there, and just *kept* running, till today . . . and he—he—" she faltered, and her head dipped.

When her chin rose, her eyes were steely and her lips were firm. "Thank you," she said to me softly, with great sincerity.

I waved it off, and we spent the rest of the night in talking. Elyse Conning had had it pretty bad. The first wave of Plague deaths had begun as she sat in the office of a lawyer, and the afflicted had run screaming down the halls of the building; one had crashed through the plate glass of the lawyer's door, died on the floor before her desk. Her employer had gone the next day, and Elyse had gone to stay in the convent, Our Lady of Immaculate Conception. The toll had been heavy there, too—but when the religious fanatics had broken down the gates, killed what few Sisters were left, she had started running. It had been worse for her than for either the Gimp or me.

I was too big for anybody to go around attacking without worry of retribution, and the Gimp was a natural-born hider. Then I'd taken care of him when he couldn't any longer.

But Elyse Conning was a sharp cookie to have made it alone through the last three months.

"That's an interesting watch you have there," I said, taking her wrist between my fingers. It was diamond-shaped, with a grill, and several dials set within dials. It was more like some cock-eyed chronometer-stopwatch-radio a gadget house had invented. She jerked her hand away quickly, covered the affair with her other hand. She changed the subject a little too quickly. "Who do you think started the Plague?"

It was a strange question. I'd never considered for a moment that it was anyone but Ruskie-Chink. They had thrown it first, and it had backfired on them. Who else could it have been?

"Why, Ruskie-Chink. Who else could it have been?" Gimp said, doubling my thoughts.

She jerked her head around to stare at him. His question threw her off-balance, and she mumbled a weak, "Why, I don't . . . know . . . perhaps it was, uh, some other, uh—"

She never had a chance to finish, because the warning lights started blinking, and the Gimp leaped from his bucketseat relaxor, sprinted up the ramp to the firecontrol room. I was on his heels, and

Elyse Conning's weird watch, and her weirder question, faded from our minds as we saw the mob of Screamies coming toward us across the cleared expanse of Central Park.

There were at least thirty of them, and how or why they had banded together, I didn't know. Perhaps their mutual infirmity had drawn them close, and they were out looking for others to afflict. It was one of the strange effects of the Plague that those stricken tried to communicate it to others. The Gimp set the gatling gun on *automatic sweep*.

He depressed the load and fire buttons, and the gun rolled down its tracks. The first burst swept the mob from left to right. The crackling smash of sound ripped the silent night to shatters, and the Screamies let out the typical Plague screams that had given them their nickname; they fell like new-mown grain. The bodies piled atop one another, and still they came on. There must have been more hidden behind the debris at the edge of the Park entrance, because after a few moments they were using the piled corpses as a barricade behind which they crouched, heaving rocks.

The sound of stones hailing on the contour shape of the Place hardly bothered us. It was dulled by three layers of durasteel, and soundproofing solid enough to keep out blast concussion from an H-bomb.

They were doomed, and they must have known it, because suddenly a group of them leaped to their feet, and tried to run. The robot tracker raised the sights of the gatling gun, and sprayed them, twenty feet down the path. They jerked and leaped in the air, and fell forward, twisting into horrible positions. But while the gun had been elevated, three Screamies tried to rush the egg.

They got as far as the outer perimeter, and the mines got them. The first one was split right up the center, from groin to throat, spraying yellow excretion and blood over the charred black ground. His buddies were flashing novas for an instant, and then we heard the cascading sounds of flesh and bone hitting the egg.

I heard a retching sound behind me, and Elyse Conning was there, being violently ill all over the bulkheads of the egg. I heard her murmuring, "Oh, you'll do fine.

Just fine. Maybe too fine. Oh, when will they come? When!"

I only heard it distantly, because the barking rattle of the gatling finishing off the Screamies — right through their flimsy barricade, lifting the corpses with the impact of the .750, tossing them out of the way for a clear line of fire—was filling the control room with sound. I filed it away, just another strain of the Plague days.

But it bothered me.

The next morning, the Gimp and I went out and burned the bodies. We'd killed thirty-eight Screamies.

Bad luck came to the egg three weeks later.

The Screamies had pretty well died away. Those that had resisted the Plague—but *were susceptible*—came down with it, bloated, screamed, screamed, screamed, and then died. Some went quietly as the dust, others made a fuss, and a few tried to get in at us in the Place. They never made it.

Three weeks after Elyse Conning came to stay with the Gimp and me, all the Screamies were gone, and the only people alive (and alive in the whole world, I assumed) were those who were immune. A pretty damned

hardy stock they'd have had to be, too.

Elyse had withstood it, but there was something strange about her, something indefinable. It wasn't just me that saw it, it was the Gimp, too. I've got to say this for him. Gimp knew a ringer when he saw one. That long in the army, he'd have had to know them, to last. There were speech mannerisms, and tilts of the head that were just, well, how can I put it? Just *not quite right*. And there were times when she would pull at herself, at the tight skirt, at the ripped sweater, at herself, as though she wasn't quite sure she was who she was.

Then one day, the Gimp spoke to me when we were out alone in the city, foraging for small arms and food.

"Terry," he said, with a strained expression on his face, as though he had something to say, and didn't really want to say it, "you ever notice anything wrong with Elyse?"

I wasn't sure of what I'd seen myself, and I didn't want to lead his thoughts in that direction if they weren't headed that way on his own. And I had a big hunch the Gimp didn't like Elyse's tak-

ing away so much attention from him. I guess he was afraid I'd stalk off and leave him. He was wrong, of course, but I answered, "Well, I don't know, Gimp, what do you mean?"

He scratched at the bald spot, and sat down on a hump of masonry. "I—I just don't know, Terry. But . . . hell . . . she just don't ring true, y'know what I mean?"

I played dumb to see if he'd caught what I'd caught. "No, Gimp. What are you talkin' about?"

He tried to explain, but he couldn't. He stuttered and fumbled and couldn't come out with it, but I was sure he was right. Still, there was the chance it had been my tension and the Gimp's jealousy. "Like that watch thing, for instance," he finished. "Why'd she lose it the day after you asked her about it?"

I'd wondered about that, too.

"Well, she said it was broken when I saw it," I replied, "and she said since it was broken, she'd thrown it away the next day."

"Then why'd she keep it so long after it broke?" he asked.

I shrugged. I didn't have any answer to that but the one Elyse had offered.

He clammed up then, and didn't say any more. But I saw him watching her tight-close when we got back to the egg, and saw her notice it. I knew there was stress there, and I knew it was going to crack soon.

And it did, dammit!

That night.

I was pounding my ear on the sack by the fire control banks, as asleep as I'd been since the Plague, when Elyse's scream brought me straight up on the bunk. Her scream came again and then again, twice and three times, as she screeched in terror. I was off the bunk, the .48 in my hand, and windmilling down the ramp into the egg's center. The lights were out, but there was enough soft glare from the control banks around the walls to show me Elyse struggling with the Gimp. Her skirt was pulled up and the whiteness of her flesh shone in the bank glare. The Gimp was struggling fiercely with her, trying to choke her. She was screaming, again and again, and the sound set my fingers to twitching.

"Get away from her, Gimp! Gimp!"

He spun around, dragging her with him, dragging her

off the bunk, ripping her sweater till I could see the shape of her bicep muscles, the round top of her breast. He stared up at me, and his eyes were wild, terrified. "No!" he screamed, "I'm gonna kill her! She was callin' someone on that watchin'! She ain't been nothin' but trouble since she came here, I'm gonna—"

I don't know what it was. Perhaps it was that I thought Gimp was going to kill her out of spite. Maybe it was that I'd gotten more than just friendly with Elyse during the past three weeks and she meant something to me. Maybe it was her steady screaming, that I wanted to shut off. Maybe it was just nervousness.

But before I knew what I was doing, the .48 jumped in my hand, and the kick of it knocked it loose from my grip, and the sound of the report echoed and re-echoed in the egg, and the Gimp jerked once, and spun on his heels, and fell loose from Elyse Conning, his hands slipping down her body as she stood watching him tumble into his own blood. Then he was gone, into the hole, and I heard the moan come out of me like I'd killed my last friend. And I had.

I ran down the ramp, and fell down beside him. The hole was right in his cheek, and it had cut downward, and there was blood all over everything. For an hour I sat there on my knees, swaying forward and backward, with his head cradled in my lap, and the blood dried all over me, and Elyse standing there silent, with her eyes bright in the bank-shine.

I just sat there, and moaned and cried, and felt more for him than for anyone I'd ever known in my whole life. More than my folks, or my kid brothers, or myself, or anyone and I kept saying, "Gimp, Gimp, Gimp, Gimp," over and over again, till it was everything and everywhere. I cried like I hadn't cried since I was a kid.

I cried because I'd killed him over her, and I wasn't sure she was worth it. Once she tried to kneel beside me and kiss me, and tell me the Gimp had tried to rape her, but it was more than I could take, and I slammed her with my fist, and she fell back against the bulkhead and just lay there watching me. I guess she'd never seen a man cry before, or so much, blood.

But she didn't look sorry.

Along about early morning,

when the sun was starting to coat the twisted girders of the dead city, I took him outside, very carefully, and dug a hole for him. You can't burn a friend like you can a Screamie, can you?

So the Gimp was gone, and Elyse said she didn't know a thing about what he'd said . . . about her calling someone on that watch-thing. She swore she'd thrown it away three weeks before, and I couldn't find it anywhere in the egg, so I had to believe her.

But it wasn't good any more. I couldn't touch her again. She came to me many times in the night as I lay looking out through the gun slit in the egg, and tried to make love to me, but I just—just couldn't touch her. The barrier was too big now.

It went like that for another month, and every now and then I heard her muttering—when she thought I wasn't around to hear—something like, "When will they come? Will they get me in time?"

And I wondered what it was all about. And I wondered if it was worth the Gimp's dying. Because now he was gone, and I was all alone on the Earth. With those who had survived the Plague, and

the Plague, and Elyse Conning.

Then, in the fifth month after the Plague had struck, they did come.

Out of the sky. They were not Ruskie-Chink, and Ruskie-Chink hadn't spread the Plague. They came out of the sky, and they were from somewhere else. From Hell or from Space, it didn't matter.

They were ships. Two of them, joined together by invisible bonds, and they landed in the middle of the city. Blasting away everything that was beneath their ships.

From Hell or from Space, it didn't matter.

All that day the call went out. It wasn't in the air, and it made no sound, but it was there. It first started in my head, ten minutes after the ships came down. They were long, tapering vessels, and they came in on their bellies. Bolts of that same black lightning—the day of the Plague seeding—struck out from beneath them, and they settled down on those legs, till they lay horizontal in the center of the city. Long and silvered, they lay there, as though asleep and waiting.

Then, the call started. It was in my head, and I knew, somehow, that it was in the

head of everyone left alive on the Earth.

The call came like this:

We call you, people of Earth, to fight with us! We come to you from the stars, where a great war is being waged, and we offer you the privilege of fighting with us. We come to you from Nago, largest planet of the Nagon Federation. All who wish to fight with us, come to our battleship, and you will be received. You have met the test, and passed it. We will accept all Earthmen. Come now . . . and know that anyone left after recruiting, will die when we scorch the Earth. We will repeat this message every hour.

They repeated it every hour. And my first hint of who—or what—Elyse Conning really was, came that day. As the message began, I leaped to my feet, there in the Place, and my head cast about like a dog on scent. I tried to figure out what it was, and then I knew. It was from the ships, and they were from the stars, and there were aliens in those ships.

So the Plague had not been seeded by Ruskie-Chink. To have first the Plague, and now this, was too much coincidence for them to be separate. The two incidents

were connected. The aliens had sown the Plague.

But why?

To conquer us? It seemed ridiculous to ruin a perfectly good planet, burn it to the ground level, with only ten per cent of its population left. There had to be another reason for the Plague, for this offer to fight with them, for everything that had happened.

"Did you hear that?" I asked Elyse suddenly.

She stared at me uncomprehending for a second—a second longer than anyone would have, had they received that message—and then, as though she realized what she was supposed to have heard, she nodded quickly. "Yes. Strange, isn't it?"

Strange, hell! Who in God's Domain would use a word like *strange* for what had just popped into my head? And supposedly, her head? Uncanny? Frightening? Unbelievable? Any of those, but never strange. It was as though she wasn't precisely sure of what she was supposed to have heard, as though she knew the approximate message, and was faking it. But I didn't press the point.

Yet I knew there was something terribly askew

with Elyse Conning. If that was her name.

So I waited.

I waited, and I ignored the call. It came steadily, and all during the day I saw men and women picking their way through the rubble that was New York City, heading toward the two invisibly-joined ships lying silent. Hundreds—the few hundreds who had been hardy enough to withstand the Plague—headed inward from the suburbs, from what had been Jersey, and Connecticut and I imagined as far away as Baltimore and Washington. They came in hordes then . . . clutching for any chance at life. It was all alien to them. Men from the stars, spaceships, interstellar wars—as alien and unbelievable as it was to me—but at least there was a way of life being offered to them, not just the ashes of a decimated Earth.

But I didn't go.

And I didn't mention the message to Elyse again. But I watched her carefully, so she was unaware of my scrutiny. When the time came for the message, and she could glance at the wall chronometer to see that time was near, she would seem to wait impatiently, and then—

close to the time, the moment, the message came—she would grin tiredly and say, "There it is again." But when she was doing something, or we were out in the debris, or she just had a slip of the mind about it, she made no mention, and there was no jump or startlement in her.

I knew finally, what it was.

Elyse Conning was *not* getting the message the Earthmen were. She was getting no message at all. She knew there was supposed to *be* a message—for I had at no time told her what I was hearing—but she was faking it. And if she knew there *was* a message, but was not getting it, that meant she knew about it before it happened.

Dull-witted and fat-headed though I am, I eventually pieced some of it together. Elyse Conning was working with the aliens.

Whether she was an alien herself—and she *looked* no more than human—or she was a quisling spy . . . that I did not know. But I knew instinctively, down inside my gut, the way I knew I had shot the wrong person when I shot the Gimp, that going with these Nagons to fight their war was the worst possible thing any Earthman could do.

But I had to wait and see what I could do. I was not egotistical or foolish enough to think I could stop what the Nagons were doing. But I knew I had a vital link here in Elyse Conning, and I was damned if I was going to go potting out to the stars to fight somebody else's war. I'd had one here on Earth—picked up a brace of scars and a dummy shinbone—and almost another, and this Plague crap had been plenty enough trouble for me for a couple of lifetimes. I nixed the whole deal, and Elyse Conning wasn't getting out of my sight.

I watched all day as the Earthies streamed to the ships.

It got me sick to my belly, but there it was.

Because I kept her in my sight, and because she finally realized I knew something I wasn't telling, I saw her contacting the Nagons on her watch-thing. Night had come down just like it always does, with no big fanfare, and Elyse had curled up against the wall in the heart of the Place. I was up in fire control, as usual.

But I heard the whine building, along about four in the morning. I heard it,

and turned cautiously on the bunk, and saw the faint pink glow from Elyse's corner. I didn't know whether or not they could hear what was happening on the other end, but I was off that bunk, and down the ramp so fast she couldn't hide the damned thing the way she had the night I'd shot the Gimp.

I grabbed it out of her hand, and threw it against the wall. It just fizzled there and the pink glow started getting steadier, so I came over and crunched it eight times with my barracks booted foot. The damned thing went phut! and spattered like some garbage made of tin and time-parts. She just sat there and whined for a minute, then her eyes got harder and colder and deeper and something else!

I knew then she wasn't an Earthie.

She was Nagon right through and through.

I grabbed her up by her hair, and for a second she resisted. Then she swayed toward me and tried to gaff me with that body of hers. I clubbed her in the breasts with the back of my hand, and her scream hit the inner walls of the egg like a fire siren. I don't know what it

was . . . I didn't need to keep hitting her . . . I think she knew she had lost her hold on me and that I was half-crazy with fear and memory . . . but all I could think of was the Gimp, the way he'd looked when I'd shot him . . .

And I beat the hell out of her.

The crack-crack-crack of my fist was a sharpness in the still of the Place, and when I was so tired my hand wouldn't come up to her face again, she looked pretty bad.

She was bleeding from the forehead and the mouth and the nose, and one of her eyes was starting to puff shut. It was a lousy way to treat a woman, but by then I wasn't even sure that was what she was. Elyse tried to say something, and she finally managed to wiggle a sentence between her puffed lips.

"Te-erry . . . no, you can't . . . I . . . stop . . . you made love to me . . . you said . . ."

I cut her off by shoving her down on the bunk. I wasn't gentle, but then the world had become pretty damned un-gentle a few months before. "Now look, you," I said, level and steady, so she'd know none of her bushwhah was going to take me the way it had before, "you just come out and give me the whole

story, or so help me I'll spread you out till you holler for me to kill you. And even then I won't."

She stared at me, and nothing more came out of her mouth, so I slammed her again, and I screamed, "*Talk, damn you!*" so loud the cords in my neck strained, and my ears popped.

She looked scared then, and the story came out.

"I knew . . . I knew after the first few months they shouldn't have fooled with Earth. You're more than they wanted . . ." her words were slurred, and run together, but I got the message, and prodded her to go on. The prod wasn't too gentle, either.

"I'm a Nagon," she said.

"There's a war going on out there, Terry, and we need more fighters. We have a recruiting system, so we only get the toughest fiber from every race." She was speaking slowly, but the picture was puffing out steadily. "First they drop an advance agent . . ."

I spat, "That's you, right?"

She nodded. "Terry, they're my race . . . they've got to win . . . they've been fighting for ten thousand years, long before Earth had humans. Terry, don't you see, I'm not

a spy, I was doing what I had to do . . ."

For a minute her sincerity, the pleading in her voice, almost won me, and then I thought of the Gimp, and how he'd sensed what she was, and what she was doing . . . and how I'd killed him, because of false trust in her. Then I knew her job had been done too well. I grated a short sharp word, and she knew what it meant.

She went on, "I was supposed to observe you during the Plague, see if the race was worthy of fighting with us, those that were left."

I stopped her. "Why?"

"Well . . ." she hesitated, and I raised my hand. She went on, "Any planet is a base for Them, and so we have to scorch it so they can't use it. But we want, we need, fighters, and we've offered the privilege to many races. They've joined us, Terry. It's a great honor . . ."

Honor? God protect her, because I wanted to strangle her till her tongue swelled black in her head. They had decided we were a potentially valuable batch of fighters, so they had dropped a Plague to kill off all but the best. We had been put under the most horrible kind of training program, without being ask-

ed, without caring whether our families and children and friends died, all because those Nagons thought it was an honor to fight with them.

"Talk," I said, clenching my big stupid fists behind me.

She wet her bleeding lips, and talked.

"I sent in my report, and it was affirmative. You impressed me highly, Terry, you and your race. I thought you would be the best recruits we'd ever gotten. There was a savagery in Earthmen I'd never seen in any other race." Her face clouded at that, and I knew something was bothering her. I remembered the time she had been murmuring to herself, "Oh, you'll do fine. Just fine. Maybe too fine." Was this Nagon woman afraid of us? It didn't seem possible.

It seemed there were some points that didn't figure in, so I asked her.

"I was supposed to stay here and report the effects of the Plague on you," she answered tightly. "I'd been here over two years already—as advance scout—and had an identity built up. I had my sonex to put up a shield around me, in case of danger," she added, looking down toward the watch-thing

I had crushed, "but to maintain the protection field, there has to be a tie with normal space around the force field, and so there is a tiny antenna-tip that lies outside the protection. Every now and then there is a case of a sonex getting broken by contact of that tip with some solid object outside the field.

That's what happened to me, shortly before you came along. That man jumped me, and the sonex field-segment was shattered. But the communication device still worked. So I had to stay safely hidden till the ships came, so I could maintain my usefulness as a liaison link. You were just what I needed—a safe place, where I would not have to worry about the Plaguesick ones outside."

My stomach heaved. She'd offered herself to me, just for some lousy protection. She'd made me kill the Gimp, just to keep her hide unsullied, so she could enslave my planet. I would have killed her right then and there, if an idea hadn't jumped into my head. A damnfool idea, but the only one I had at the time, knowing my choice was going to be either scorched to death or fighting in the Nagon legions.

"So the Plague, and every-

thing that's followed it, have been only to weed out the hardy ones in my race, so they can fight with Nagon in its interstellar war, is that it?" I asked.

She nodded, and I thought right then that her analysis of savagery in Earthmen was as nothing compared to her own race. I told her so, in detail.

Then I told her what we were going to do, to even the score.

She stared at me and mumbled, "This time we went too far. This time we met the wrong race. I'm afraid."

And I wondered if maybe she wasn't right. You get an Earthie mad enough, get him sick to his gut enough, and maybe you *do* have the deadliest enemy in the universe. Maybe.

I'd soon know, at any rate.

We had joined the procession to the ships. I had the .48 in my jacket pocket, bulging, but wrapped in my hand, and Elyse more scared of me than the gun . . . and I couldn't much blame her.

I'd found out one thing more from her, inadvertently. The ships were held together like the sides of an orange crate, with invisible bonds, like the horizontals of the

crate. But there was a very live energy constantly pouring across those invisible lines. The two ships that had landed were recruiting ships.

There was a Plague-seeding ship that stopped at a world only once, then went plunging to its next stop in space—which in this case was the fourth planet of a yellow-green sun in Bootes—never returning. Some of them had been out as long as one thousand years. The Nagons lived longer than us, it seemed.

These ships—which were actually the two sections of one ship, joined together by those invisible bonds—were the recruiting ships . . . and once they had gone, there would be no others. Many of these went out, and never returned, and Nago, too busy fighting its endless war, never inquired what had happened to that recruiting ship. Fortunes of war. Loss in the field, was the way it was marked.

Well, I was going to see if I couldn't settle such a mark on the two ships lying in the middle of New York City.

As we neared the ship, I saw the people streaming in from surrounding streets, some in battered and bullet-holed cars, a few on motorcycles, some even on bicycles. They were hurrying, but

there was a damned expression on their faces. If they had their choice of getting scorched to a cinder or fighting for some aliens, at least fighting kept them alive a little longer. I'm sure no one thought he would ever get back alive . . . or if there would be anything to get back to!

Then I saw my first alien.

The Nagons were not at all like us, as I'd assumed, from having examined Elyse Conning's body thoroughly. They were completely different. Their body chemistry was different. I looked at them, and I looked at Elyse. She didn't say a word, but I knew.

They had changed her. They had warped her body, somehow, and changed her into a human being. But she was an alien.

Had we not been coming under the scrutiny of the aliens clustered around the ships, I would have clubbed the thing that had told me it was Elyse Conning, till it was a pulped nothing. As it was, I rammed the muzzle of the .48 harder into its back. It jerked, and kept moving.

"Now you know what to say to them," I murmured, and she nodded. "I can still put a slug through you, even if they get me."

She—it—didn't need to nod again. It just kept walking.

As we got closer, I realized the aliens were not dressed in some hard armorlike clothing, but were in actuality even more alien than I'd thought. They stood five to seven feet tall, with large heads that rose to a blunt point, almost like a water-drop. Their eyes were thin pocketed slits, and the noses were the same. The mouth was a fish-mouth, such a thin slit, that the face looked like an unblemished expanse of putty, deep sea-aquamarine in color, with four little lines running horizontally on it. Two above in a line, one below, and one below that.

No necks. Heavy, square shoulders. Hands that ended in seven-fingered, webbed extremities. And their skin was like that of a turtle's shell, or more closely, and terrifyingly, the shell of an armadillo. The movable segments were rasping at the elbow joints—two, not one joint—at the spot where the head hunkered onto the torso, at the twin knee-joints, around the center of the long torso. They were walking armor-plated monsters.

Each one wore a watch-

thing—a sonex—on its thick wrist, and a faint pink glow surrounded each Nagon. So that was their protection. Each had a personal body shield. I knew I could not get through that, overpower anyone. I'd have to use trickery, and my ace in the hole . . . Elyse Conning-thing.

Three booths had been set up outside the ship's locks. They were ostensibly identification booths, where each man or woman—I saw no children—had a banded ident tag fastened to his wrist. The people were moving slowly, and I wasn't sure whether they might not be going right to a ship's cell, till the recruiting vessels were off-Earth.

It was fairly obvious there would be other stops for this ship on Earth. Perhaps many, to pick up the hardiest survivors all across the blasted Earth. But locked in a cell, I could do no good . . . and I felt now was the time to take them; before they filled the holds with Earthies; and before some rash fool without a plan tipped them off by sudden assault, that the Earthies did *not* consider the gift of the Plague, the death of their planet, and the chance to die for the glory of Nago—an honor!

I mumbled into Elyse's ear,

"Give them the signal, tell them I am a special warrior, and that you're taking me in to see your commander or whatever you call him. And don't forget. One word wrong and away goes your belly . . . then they'll *never* get a chance to change you back to a turtle, Nagon."

The Nagon nodded slightly, and as we approached one of the pink-aura guards, she let fly a stream of musical clicks and hums. The guard moved aside, ushered us both in with a gash-mouth grin more like an expression of agony. We moved past him, and for an instant I thought sure I'd get something hot or sharp in my ribs. But Elyse Conning-thing was too scared. I guess she knew Earthies were pretty mean when double-crossed. We went into the ship, and moved down its brightly, pinkly luminous corridors.

When we were out of sight along one huge wormlike tunnel, I smashed it up against the wall, with the .48 under its human nose, and grated, "What's the best way to send this pair of ships sky-high.

It wouldn't talk for a while, but breaking a human arm in four places, slowly, painfully,

with a dirty hankie wadded into the mouth, can bring anyone around. She—it—the thing, fainted twice from the pain, then, slumped sitting against the tunnel bulkhead, it confessed, "Down this corridor. Set in the wall at the sign of the blue dot, are the energy banks that join these ships. Those banks . . . also . . . provide energy for the personal . . . fields of every Nagon."

That was all I wanted to know.

Then I finished her.

I finished her quickly, because I couldn't help but remember the last time I'd killed someone. I smashed in her human skull with its alienness inside, with the heavy butt of the .48 and watched the thing that had made me kill the Gimp, slide over sideways, wet and gone.

Then I sprinted down the corridor for the energy banks.

I found them almost at once, and pried off the cover-plate with my bayonet. The banks were inside, and there was no tell-tale pink glow around them. There couldn't be; they had to be able to adjust and repair them. I opened up with the .48 and the first three shots ploughed

through the main tanks of the energy banks, threw off a cloud of some yellow gas, and sparks showered in every direction. I felt a hideous burning on my face and hands, even through my shirt to my chest, and realized too late that I'd let out some form of radiation.

I looked at death then, for the first time, really, and it scared me. I was going to die, I knew that. I was going to die here in this most fantastic of all places. On an alien ship, on a Plague Earth, with so much undone, and so much to account for. But that was the way it would end.

Then I heard a noise behind me, and saw a guard with a long, trident-pronged weapon, stumbling down the corridor. I put another shot into a clear transparent bubble affair on the banks, and glassite shattered in all directions. The guard's field snapped off, and he was standing unprotected.

I swiveled the .48 just as he blasted, and caught him high in the forehead with the blast. The bullet went in sloppy, and came out bloodily sloppier. He kept running for a step, then tumbled forward and smashed flat on the deck-plates.

He was dead before he hit.

I turned back to the energy banks.

I knew a lot of Earthies would die, those who were in the hold, and those who were outside, but so would every Nagon. And it was more important now, that Earth had another chance. That Earth survived, even blasted, and with its Plague, to build itself again.

I was going to die, and many men would die, but the Earth would live on, and whatever it had been that had so terrified the Elyse-Connинг-thing, so she thought the Nagons had met their match in the Earthies, that thing would have a chance to flower.

I turned back to the energy banks, and emptied the .48 into it; and as the potential whined and built, and gathered itself for an explosion I knew would crater the center of New York City, I grinned inside.

The Nagons might never come to Earth again, and no other alien race might ever come—though I doubted that. But even if they didn't, this explosion would give Earth the time it needed, and if they ever did come, the Earthies would be ready for them.

Then, in that instant before the flash and scream of

THE PLAGUE BEARERS

energy ripping energy, I thought of something else: the aliens might not *have* to come to Earth. If what Elyse had thought was true, and there was a singular drive in the Earthies, then humanity would be going to the aliens.

And those would-be conquerors had better watch out, then!

The energy banks screamed, and the heavens were filled with the light of flaming destruction.

THE END

WHO

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Enderby found a good thing out in space—a bunch of natives waiting to worship him. He'd always enjoyed being head man so everything worked out fine. Until he learned that—

Gods Also Die

By DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

THE first thing Amos Enderby did upon setting foot outside the spaceship was jump.

It wasn't Enderby's idea, but as far as the natives were concerned, it brought the house down.

Enderby jumped twice his height into the air and soared magnificently over the terrain, over the crowd of natives who had come to see the gleaming metal thing which had fallen from the sky, and over the spaceship itself. He alighted dizzy and terrified, and his face may have revealed this for a split-second, but at that precise instant the natives had all touched their foreheads to the ground and never saw his face. Being an opportunist, Enderby rearranged his features and faced

the natives with a benign smile on his countenance when they finally lifted their eyes to look at him.

"The Great Lord Tashtu!" one of them wailed, and again they flung themselves to the ground, their blue skins shivering in the twilight cold.

The Great Lord Tashtu, or he who had been mistaken for the Great Lord Tashtu, was in reality a renegade and escaped prisoner from Earth who had commandeered a spaceship with the solar police breathing down the back of his neck, taken the spaceship into hyperspace with its two passengers as prisoners, and crash-landed on an as-yet unidentified world when the fuel supply became exhausted.

Enderby stood perfectly



Lemuel

At a time like this a man had to act like a god.

still while they paid him homage. Then, for effect, he jumped again. By now he knew that the world of the blue sun was very much smaller than Earth, that its pull of gravity was far less than Earth's, that he could jump prodigiously almost without effort. The effect on the natives was the same as before. Following the evolutionary rule in this sector of the galaxy, they were humanoids—in this case, in a primitive stage of development.

They brought Enderby gifts of food and drink and then retreated to the nearby village. Enderby returned to the spaceship, taking seven-league strides.

"Hey, you two," he said, beaming, as he entered the airlock of the small cruiser. "See that?"

Fred Reedbuck, the owner of the cruiser, did not seem impressed. "Yeah, I saw it. So what?"

Reedbuck and his daughter Phyllis had been en route to the Centauri System for a vacation when Enderby had taken their ship at blaster-point. Reedbuck was as small and spare and usually reserved as Enderby was large, heavy, and outspoken.

"So what?" boomed Ender-

by. "Are you kidding? They think I'm some kind of a god, that's what. You see anything wrong with that?"

"I don't know," Reedbuck said.

"Well, I do know. We'll have them eating off the palm of our hand till we figure a way to get fuel for the ship. Anything wrong with that? Look what happened in Mexico, few hundred years ago. Fellow name of Cortez. They thought he was a god, so he conquered the place with a handful of men. Well, why not now?"

"There's that," Reedbuck admitted, then asked: "What are you going to do with us, Enderby?"

Enderby patted the blaster hanging by his side. "Given up trying to do something about it, huh?"

"I just asked a question."

"Well, now," Enderby declared magnanimously, "I guess a god from space could use a couple of assistant gods, or at least a high priest and a pretty young high priestess. What do you say?"

Just then Phyllis Reedbuck entered the small control room of the spaceship. "Thanks for the compliment," she said, "but I want no part of it."

"Of what, for crying out

loud?" Enderby asked, crest-fallen.

"Of playing god to a bunch of natives we don't know a thing about."

"Phyllis means it's liable to backfire," Reedbuck said.

Enderby snorted and told them, "It isn't hard to figure. Maybe a thousand, two thousand years ago a spaceman came down here on this planet. He impressed heck out of the natives. They made a god out of him, see? One of the things they remembered was, he could jump. When they saw me jump, they figured I was their spacegod come back. They'll do anything we want, I know they will. We'll live off the fat of the land."

"You'll live off the fat of the land," Reedbuck said. "We'll stay inside the ship, thank you."

Phyllis nodded. She was a plain-looking girl with a good figure and a face which, while not pretty, lit up so animatedly when her interest was aroused, that she became attractive.

Grumbling, Enderby went inside to the radio-closet. He'd spent several minutes in there every day, supposedly attempting to repair a minor flaw in the sub-space system. Actually, Enderby had seen to it that the radio

would never send a message again. Since the Reedbucks didn't know a thing about sub-space radio, he could get away with it. Since Amos Enderby had been convicted of murder back in Sol System and sentenced to death for his crime, he considered that a pretty fortunate thing.

The next day, Enderby went to town.

Or, the Great Lord Tashtu went to town. He wore his space helmet but not his spacesuit. The air on this planet was pretty good, but his translator was lodged in the helmet and he wouldn't make much headway without that. A cold wind blew, the horizon was incredibly close, and a hazy blue dusk seemed to hang perpetually in the air. It would not have been Enderby's first choice as a place to retire, but he decided wisely enough that fugitive murderers couldn't be very picky. Besides, the idea of playing a god appealed to him.

He walked into town, careful not to jump. He wanted a parley this time, not foreheads in the dust. The buildings, small and round, seemed to be made of adobe. Every building in the village, of which there were upwards of

fifty, was spherical—except for one. It stood in the central square of the town, had a tall spire, and seemed quite deserted, the windows shuttered and the door barred. A crowd of the natives led him to it and stopped there in the central square. One of them, a tall, white-haired man whose chalky blue skin was exposed except for the tunic and skirt he wore, held up his hand and spoke. The crowd was immediately silent.

Enderby fingered the translator switch and heard the speech in his earphones.

"We welcome you to Bor-dai, Lord Tashtu," said the old man. "We welcome you in the name of your children who have ever revered your name since the time you visited us before civilization began."

Enderby smiled. So this was what they called civilization. Well, they had their ideas about it and he had his.

". . . welcome you particularly," the old man was saying, "because you have come on the eve of the great spring planting, O Lord of fecundity. This is a lean, hard world, Lord Tashtu. Have you come at last to fulfill the old legends and make our hard land bountiful?"

Enderby turned the volume of his translator to its highest and said, "It is exactly as you say," then heard the amplifier boom the alien words out across the plaza. In the complete silence, the amplified voice sounded quite god-like. It even impressed Enderby. The blue-skinned natives fell in the dust.

Finally the old man, apparently a priest of the cult of Lord Tashtu, got to his feet and said apologetically: "Lord, not for a moment do I doubt your identity. However—"

"To doubt," shouted Enderby, "is to die!" There was no sense letting any heresy get out of hand.

"—however," went on the priest uncomfortably, "there are those among us in the younger generation who wish the Great Lord Tashtu can prove his identity to us beyond all question. Will you do this, Lord?"

Enderby glanced about suspiciously, wondering what such proof would entail. He said, "I am grieved that any among you dare doubt me. However, what is this proof you wish?"

"You will do it, Lord Tashtu?" asked the priest.

Enderby paused. He looked

around. There was respect on the faces in the crowd now, but not absolute worship. They didn't like the delay. Their god would have responded at once, and affirmatively. Probably it was written that way in their religion, although they would never tell Enderby that if they had any doubts about him.

"I'm listening," Enderby said.

"It is written," recited the priest from his memory, "that the Great Lord Tashtu comes from the sky, even as you came. It is written that Tashtu can make our land fructify by certain ancient rites. It is written that the Great Lord Tashtu can leap to prodigious heights, which you have done, Lord. It is also written that the Great Lord Tashtu can walk through fire."

Enderby gulped as the natives nodded and chanted. The priest held up his hand, and they were quiet. "The holy fire has been prepared, Lord," he said.

Even as the priest spoke, Enderby saw a glow behind the single tall building. It came from the other side of the central plaza. The crowd began to drift in that direction, led by the priest of

Tashtu. Enderby could either follow or reveal himself as a sham. But if he was so revealed, there was no telling what might happen. Their religious feelings aroused, the blue-skinned primitives might do anything. Anything, thought Enderby in alarm. And, with absolutely no fuel in the hoppers of the spacer, there also was no telling how long he would have to remain here. Forever, he had already told himself, if indeed the people accepted him as their god.

Frowning, his heart pounding violently, Enderby followed the priest and the others to the other side of the square. There a great fire had been kindled. It was perhaps fifty feet across at the base and sent orange-yellow tongues of flame leaping at least that height into the air. It would burn all the phoney gods there ever were, Enderby included, to a cinder.

"The holy fire, Lord!" the priest intoned.

From where he stood, Enderby could feel its intense heat. He smiled weakly at the priest, hoping his features were at least partially obscured behind the glassite of the helmet and by the pall of smoke.

The crowd formed a circle, waiting. Enderby took a deep

breath. Think, man, he told himself. Think. Your life depends on it.

On impulse, he jumped as high as he could. The crowd oo'd and ah'd. That still got them, at any rate. Enderby came down and jumped again, back in the direction of the spaceship. Now that he had it, the solution was so incredibly simple that he felt weak with relief.

He entered the airlock, removing his helmet.

"How's the god-business?" Reedbuck asked caustically.

"Don't think it's going to work, eh?"

Phyllis said: "Dad thinks you're playing with fire."

Enderby boomed laughter. "Actually and literally!" he said. "Playing with fire—girl, you're a prophetess."

Naturally, they didn't know what Enderby was talking about. While they were trying in vain to figure it out, he got down his spacesuit which, like all such models, could withstand temperatures up to two-thousand degrees—far hotter than any bonfire the Bordai natives could build. He climbed into it, chuckling. All you needed was a little industry and a lot of guts, he told himself.

"Last chance to get on the

bandwagon," he told Reedbuck and Phyllis. "They wouldn't stop me if I wanted my own chief priest and priestess. Well, what do you say?"

Holding both his space-gloves in one hand, Enderby touched Phyllis' shoulder familiarly with the other. She drew away from him.

"Keep away from her," Reedbuck said.

"We're in this together. Might as well be friends."

"Just keep your hands off her."

Enderby shrugged. "Well, suit yourselves. Tell you this, though. We're liable to be stuck here forever. Do you want to spend the rest of your lives in a useless spaceship, living off of whatever food the natives are kind enough to send you, or do you want to live it up the way I'm going to?"

"I thought you were repairing the radio!" Reedbuck cried.

Enderby smiled at him. "You think I'm nuts? You might as well know the truth, Reedbuck. I don't figure to repair the radio at all. I like it right here".

"You dirty, lying rat!" Reedbuck cried out, and leaped at him, swinging wildly.

Enderby, who was both

bigger and younger, parried the wild blows easily and sent Reedbuck sprawling with a left over the heart and a short, savage right cross. Phyllis screamed and flung herself at him, but he threw her aside with a motion of his arm. Whimpering, she fell against a bulkhead, then climbed to her feet and crouched near her still dazed father. "You won't get away with this," she said, tears of frustrated rage in her eyes. "I hope and pray you won't get away with this."

Enderby smiled, putting on the space-gloves. "Wise up," he said. "It looks like if there is any praying to be done around here, it will be done to me."

And he stalked outside.

"Are you all right, Dad?" Phyllis asked.

"Yeah. Kind of shaky, is all."

"Do you think he'll get away with it?"

"Don't know."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stay here and see what happens. I don't want any part of Enderby."

"Yes. But knowing what he's like, I feel sorry for the natives, Dad."

Reedbuck shrugged, gingerly massaging his bruised

jaw. "I don't know about that, either," he said. "Primitive peoples have a way of taking care of themselves."

Wearing his spacesuit and carrying a fire-extinguisher containing frozen CO₂ liquified under tremendous pressure, Enderby walked into the bonfire.

The crowd, which had waited patiently for his return, was absolutely silent and following his every move rapt-eyed. With lofty unconcern, Enderby stalked into the heart of the fire and stood there. He did not rush through to the other side, for neither the heat nor the flames could in any way harm his spacesuit or bother him. Then, nonchalantly, he lifted the fire-extinguisher and depressed the firing lever.

There was a hiss and a puff of white visible inside the flames. In an instant, the fifty-foot high tongues of flame were snuffed out. Hardly any smoke drifted up from the ashes of the bonfire.

Enderby stood, arms folded across his chest, face serene, as his worshippers groveled before him.

What surprised Enderby about the shrine of the Great Lord Tashtu was that it

wasn't a building at all, but only looked like one from the outside. He had been ensconced there now for three days. Each day the people of the village and of the surrounding countryside for miles around brought him food and drink and gifts of precious stones and metals. Each night they danced almost until dawn around the great spire, in which Enderby had made his home. But it wasn't a building. It was just the shell of a building, four walls and a spire, with a luxuriant garden inside.

The garden surprised Enderby as much as the shell of a building. For the land all round the village was parched, semi-arrid desert, but the garden inside the frame of a building was quite the most luxuriant Enderby had ever seen, half a dozen acres of lush, tropical vegetation growing around an underground spring which gushed and bubbled at a dozen places coolly and sweetly.

It was, of course, an oasis. There was nothing odd about that. Still, Enderby did not know quite what to make of it.

On the afternoon of the third day, he received an additional surprise. Someone

came to see him, his first visitor since his arrival inside the garden.

It was—or seemed to be—an Earthman!

Enderby was at once on his guard, although the man certainly looked harmless enough and obviously could not have come from Earth in the recent past. The first thing he said was:

"I see you're making like the Great Lord Tashtu, young fellow."

He was a very old white-haired man with a beard halfway down to his navel. He dressed like a native.

"Just what the devil is that supposed to mean?" Enderby asked.

"What it sounds like it means. You're playing the Lord Tashtu."

"Well?" said Enderby. If necessary, he would kill this doddering old fool in cold blood. He knew a good thing when he saw it: and he wouldn't let any derelict of an Earthman ruin it for him.

"Well, nothing, young fellow. Meadows is the name. Yours?"

"Tashtu," said Enderby.

"My eye. Well, anyhow, I heard about you. Live about ten miles from here. Different village. Came as quick as I could, to see for myself.

They offered me the job, you know. Thirty-five years ago, I guess it was."

"What job?"

"Playing Tashtu, of course. What other job you think I meant?"

"As far as you are concerned or they're concerned, I am Tashtu. And don't forget it. If you want to remember anything."

Meadows smiled toothlessly. "Guess your meaning's right plain, young fellow. Well, it ain't no skin off my teeth. Good luck to you."

Meadows turned to go. "Just a minute," Enderby said. "You didn't come here to wish me luck."

"Nope. Didn't. But your attitude—"

"You let me worry about my attitude. What do you want here? If you think you are going to blackmail me—"

"Shucks. Didn't say nothing about blackmailing. You want to play their god, go ahead and play him. I could have, only I didn't have no spacesuit when it came time to jump through the fire. Convinced them I was a minor deity name of Joblux, a kind of servant of the Lord Tashtu. Naturally, they'll expect me to live here and be your servant. That all right with you?"

Enderby said it was all right. Actually, he liked the idea. This way he could keep his eye on Meadows, who was a very old man. Before you knew it, the very old became the very dead. Yes, Enderby liked the idea very well indeed.

"How did you get here?" Enderby asked.

"Same as you, I figure. Shipwreck. Ship burned, though. I was the only survivor. Happened about twenty miles out in the desert. Want to see the ruin?"

"Not particularly," Enderby said promptly. "Well, if you're going to be my servant —name of Joblux, I believe you said?—you might as well move in bag and baggage."

"Got no bag and baggage," Meadows-Joblux laughed. "Here I am."

"Good. Is there anything you can tell me about our worshippers that I ought to know? Exactly what does Tashtu do to fructify crops?"

Meadows waved his scrawny hand in a gesture of dismissal. "Ah, you know. Unusual kind of fertility rites. They don't vary much from planet to planet."

"I don't know anything about them," Enderby admitted.

Meadows looked at him thoughtfully, then, as if suddenly making up his mind about something, cackled and said: "Me either. Heck, I'm only an ex radioman off of the S.S. *Starfire*."

"Sure, but you've been here for years. Haven't you seen anything—I mean, I wouldn't want to do the wrong thing."

"Don't worry, you won't. I ain't seen nothing much, though, on account of they didn't have a real live Tashtu to mess around with. They got one now."

"Yeah," said Enderby. For some reason, he was convinced that Meadows could have told him more but had decided against it. Also for some obscure reason, he felt oddly nervous, as if playing a god might entail more than he was ready to cope with.

"Fertility festival kicks off tomorrow, you know," said Meadows.

"No. I didn't know."

"Yup. Well, where you want me to put down my sleeping bag, young fellow?"

Enderby told him, and added: "But don't call me that. I'm the Lord Tashtu. That's what you call me. It's all you call me. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. There's one thing, though, young fellow,"

Meadows said, looking uncomfortable, as if he had a guilty conscience about something, "which maybe I ought to tell you. You see, young fellow, this here fertility rite—"

Enderby reached him in one stride and bunched the tunic near his scrawny neck. "I warned you about that, you old fool!" he shouted. "Tashtu. That's what you call me. Understand?"

"Well," said the old man, trying to look down at the big hand against his throat, "I guess I understand, right enough. Just—please—leggo so's I—can breathe, will you please?"

Enderby, panting, released him. "What were you going to tell me?" he asked.

Meadows looked at him a long time before speaking. Then he said, "Nothing, Lord Tashtu. Just nothing."

"But you said—"

"Nope. Twasn't anything, Lord Tashtu. Forget it. When it comes time for the fertility rites, I guess I can help you through your paces."

Enderby indicated the growing pile of treasure in the garden. "I'll make it worth your while," he said.

Meadows cackled. "Much obliged," he said.

Enderby did not know why,

but he felt more uneasy than ever.

His second unexpected visitor came the next day, while Meadows was out in the village conferring with the priest. The visitor was a beautiful native girl who almost took his breath away. Without waiting for any kind of invitation at all, she flung herself at his feet and clasped his legs with warm, well-rounded arms.

"Lord Tashtu!" she cried. "O Lord Tashtu, thank all the gods you have come in time to save my Chakro!"

"To save your—uh—Chakro?" Enderby demanded in surprise.

"Chakro, yes. My betrothed."

"But what must I do to save him?" Enderby felt a keen sense of disappointment. Her betrothed, was it? His swift mind had conjured images of native handmaidens to do the god's every wish. Well, there would be others.

The girl smiled up at him tremulously. "But Lord—you already *have* saved him."

Enderby didn't say anything.

"In coming here, you saved him. You see, Chakro, who could run faster and jump higher than any of the men

of Bordai, had been selected to impersonate the god in the yearly fertility rites. Now, bless you, Lord, he won't have to."

"But wouldn't it have been a very great honor?" Enderby wanted to know.

"Honor, yes. But we wanted to marry."

"Oh, and the god-impostor cannot marry, is that what you mean?"

The girl smiled up at him. "You know perfectly what I mean, Lord. But you must have you—well, your joke at the expense of a mortal like me, I suppose."

"No," Enderby said. "Please tell me."

The girl stood up, looking puzzled. There was something here, Enderby thought, something he ought to know and did not. He could sense it, first in Meadows' attitude and now in the girl's. Meadows would have told him, too, if he hadn't been so severe with the old man. Well, too late to worry about that now. And besides, it wasn't just a question of severity. Enderby was a one-man society dedicated to the interests of Amos Enderby. If weak people like the Reedbucks got in his way, or like Meadows, it was just too bad.

"All right, if you wish it,

Lord," the girl said finally. "Chakro would have been honored to impersonate the Great Lord Tashtu in the fertility rites which take place tonight, but—"

"Tonight!" gasped Enderby. "Tonight!" He was suddenly, inexplicably, filled with dread.

"Of course. Tonight. The time of the sowing of the crops in our hard land. As I was saying, Lord, Chakro would have been honored. But of course you know this. Still, honor is one thing—and death another. It won't bother you, naturally, since a god can return at will in a new body. But Chakro—"

"Death!" cried Enderby. "What are you talking about?"

Just then Meadows walked into the garden. The old man was smiling toothlessly. "Made all the arrangements, Tashtu," he said. "Ceremony begins at dusk."

"What ceremony?" bleated Enderby. "I want you to tell me at once."

"Lord, I—" began the puzzled girl.

Enderby waved his hand in her direction. "You may go," he said. "You may go at once."

Bowing low, she left the

garden. Despite his bulk, Enderby took a single stride and reached Meadows' side. He looked down threateningly at the little old man, aware of the deepening in the blue haze. Night was coming. It was almost dusk already. Outside, he heard a wild chanting. It was coming closer.

"Now by heaven you'll tell me!" Enderby said in a terrible voice.

Meadows shrugged. "Shucks. Isn't anything to tell. You're a fertility god, Tashtu. Like all fertility gods, you make the divine sacrifice. Wanted to tell you yesterday, but you got so blame ornery, I figured I'd better not."

"Sacrifice? What kind of sacrifice? I'm their god, you fool. They'll do whatever I say. They fear and worship me."

"Yeah. I guess they do, young fellow. Until the fertility rite. Heck, though, they kind of expect it."

"Expect it? Expect what?"

"The sacrifice that the fertility god makes every year. Usually, o' course, it ain't a real god, just one of their young fellows made up to play the god. This year, though, looks like they corralled the real thing."

The chanting was very loud now. It had almost reached the building-shell.

"What kind of sacrifice?" Endery cried out. It sounded as if he were in pain.

"Why," Meadows said blandly, "the god dies, o' course, and with his death guarantees that the crops will be born anew next year. Works that way in all fertility rites, on earth and everywhere. The god dies, see, and is—well, figuratively born again, you might say, in the new crops."

Enderby's face drained white. He took a step toward the doorway which led through the shell of the spired building, but at that moment the vanguard of the Bordai natives entered, led by the priest of Tashtu, who carried a large, ornamental, deadly-looking sacrificial knife.

"Wait!" Enderby screamed. "It's all a mistake. I'm not Tashtu! I'm not your god! I was only making believe . . ."

The priest intoned, as if it were all part of the ancient rite: "Lord, do not forsake us at our time of greatest need."

Enderby ran wildly about the garden, with half a dozen of the natives in pursuit.

Pretty soon he tripped and the natives were on him at once. Arms pinned to his sides, they brought him back to the priest of Tashtu.

"Guess I went out there to your ship, out of curiosity," Meadows told Enderby, who was struggling futilely to get loose. "Nice folks, the Reedbucks. They told me all about you. Said as how they got themselves kidnapped by a murderer, and—"

"No! No, don't believe them, I—"

"—and this here murderer had smashed up their radio some so they were stranded here. Well, like I told you, young fellow, I used to be a radio man on the S.S. *Starfire* myself. Took a look at that there radio. Shucks, young fellow. I'll have it back in A-1 shape in a day or so. The Reedbucks'll get themselves rescued. Old guy name of Meadows might even go with them, if they'll have me."

By now hundreds of the blue-skinned Bordai, all decked out in what Meadows would have called their go-to-meeting clothes, had crowded into the garden. Two of their biggest men held Enderby's arms in a vise. The priest of Tashtu stood before him, chanting over the sacrificial knife.

"Die!" someone cried.

"Die, O Lord of Fertility, that the fertility which is your nature may be transplanted to our crops!"

Enderby cried, his voice bubbling with fear: "I'm—not—the Lord—Tashtu—"

"Lord," intoned the high priest of Tashtu again, "do not foresake us at our time of greatest need."

"Die for us, Great Lord Tashtu!"

"Die, that our crops may live!"

Meadows said: "Way I figure it, you must've wondered some about this garden. Want to know why it's so fertile?

I'll tell you why. On account of every year they sacrifice one of their young men here, play-acting Tashtu, and bury him . . ."

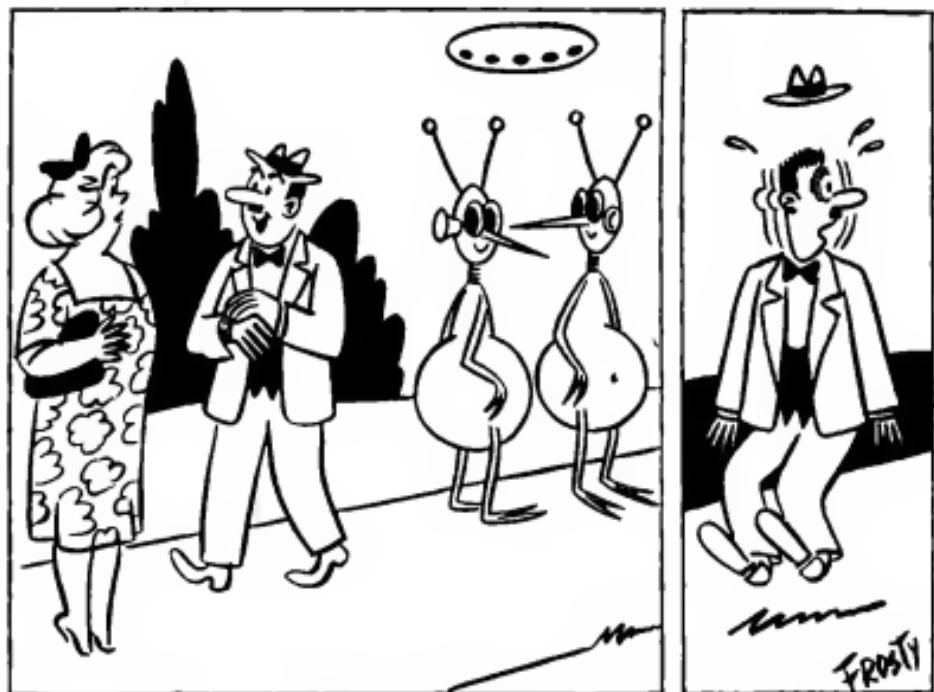
Enderby screamed: "Save me, Meadows. You can—"

But of course, Meadows could not. Once Enderby alone had the power to save himself. Now, with the deeds of his life behind him, there was nothing that could save him.

The priest's knife swept up, then down. The crowd was absolutely silent.

The Great Lord Tashtu had died again for his worshippers.

THE END



"It's three million years past—

WHAT?"

Test Your Space I. Q.

Until the star drive becomes a fact, travel to outer space is a far more remote possibility than interplanetary travel. But celestial navigation will still be based on the same constellations which guided the ancients across unknown seas. The following questions are designed to find out whether you are a true astronaut. Count 5 for each correct answer. A score of 75 or over should qualify you for a Bachelor of Stargazing, or at least enable you to find your way around on a starlit night.

1. The winter sky in the Northern Hemisphere is dominated by **Orion—Northern Cross**.
2. Earth's nearest star-neighbor is in **Ursa Major—Centaurus**.
3. To be visible to the naked eye, a star must be at least of **sixth—seventh magnitude**.
4. The first systematic listing of heavenly objects was made by **Messier—Dreyer**.
5. Polaris is a **single—double star**.
6. The Great Nebula in Andromeda is **elliptical—spiral** in shape.
7. The autumn showers of meteors takes place in **Leo—Perseus**.
8. The brightest star in our skies, Sirius, is in **Canis Minor—Canis Major**.
9. The Milky Way is believed to be about 50,000—100,000 light years in diameter.
10. Young stars like Capella are known as **red giants—red dwarfs**.
11. The classic variable stars take their name from **Cepheus—Lyra**.
12. As a star ages, its hydrogen is transformed into **oxygen—he lithium**.

13. One of the first men to study the galaxies was **Sir William Herschel**—**Tycho Brache**.
14. In classic mythology, **Ursa Major** was a beautiful maiden, killed by the jealousy of **Diana**—**Juno**.
15. The nearest galaxy to the Milky Way is the **Smaller—Greater Magellanic Cloud**.
16. The bright star **Aldebaran** is located in **Taurus—Aquila**.
17. The last supernova easily observable on Earth is associated with the name of **Johann Kepler**—**Percival Lowell**.
18. The **Coal Sacks** in the Milky Way are **star clusters—clouds of dust**.
19. The theory of the expanding universe is based on observations of the **Doppler Effect**—**Fraunhofer lines**.
20. The finest globular cluster can be seen in **Perseus—Hercules**.



ANSWERS TO SPACE QUIZ

1. *Orion* is the most brilliant of fall and winter constellations, as well as the easiest to identify. The Northern Cross is seen right overhead in summer.
2. *Centaurus*—it is Proxima Centauri, the small companion of Alpha Centauri, about $4\frac{1}{3}$ light years away.
3. *Sixth* magnitude. Stars are ranked by magnitudes according to brightness; below the sixth they must be observed through a telescope.
4. *Messier*—in 1784, he published a catalogue of nebulae and star clusters, the ones most easily observable which are now known by M and a number (i. e. Andromeda nebula is M 31). Dreyer published his New General Catalogue in 1895; it included thousands of objects and has since been brought further up to date. Objects from his catalogue are known by their NGC number.
5. *Double*—it can be resolved into two

with a small telescope. 6. *Spiral*—the only one seen clearly with the naked eye, the famous Andromeda nebula consists of a nucleus surrounded by spiral arms and an area of nebulosity. 7. *Leo*—seen in the month of November, they are known as Leonids and are the most brilliant meteors observable in the sky. The Perseids can be seen in Perseus in July and August. 8. *Canis Major*—Canis Minor has a bright star, Procyon. 9. *100,000 light years*. It is a flat spiral, "only" 10,000 light years in thickness, and is, of course, the galaxy of which our solar system is a part. 10. *Red giants*—they are stars of exceptional diameter in relation to their luminosity. As they age, they will contract and change color, eventually becoming white dwarfs. 11. *Cepheus*—they are called Cepheid variables and have a regular and rather short period of variation from lowest to highest luminosity. 12. *Helium*—this is the end-product of the thermonuclear reaction which takes place in stars and results in their contracting as they age. 13. *Sir William Herschel*—he was one of the first to believe that they were "island universes" of stars. 14. *Juno*—she became jealous of Callisto, since they both loved the same man. But when Callisto was accidentally killed by her lover, Jupiter turned her into a bear and put her up among the stars. 15. *Greater Magellanic Cloud*—it is 75,000 light years away while the Smaller is 84,000 light years away. They are irregular nebulae which can be seen in the Southern Hemisphere. 16. Alderbaran is found in *Taurus*, where it forms the Bull's eye. Aquila contains the bright star Altair. 17. *Kepler* in 1604. There was a very bright explosion in 1918, Nova Aquilae, but its brightness on Earth was the result, not of its size, but its nearness to us. Supernovae are occasionally seen by telescope at great distances. 18. *Clouds of dust*—they obscure from our view many of the stars toward the center of the Milky Way. 19. *Doppler Effect*—the observation that in an object moving away from us the spectroscope shows a red shift such as is found in the nebulae which appear to move away from us at a considerable speed. Fraunhofer lines are the spectra of stars which enable us to determine their temperatures. 20. *Hercules*—globular clusters are much rarer than open, or galactic, clusters and contain many thousands of stars.

SHOOT THE WORKS

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

Even though she came loaded with every weapon short of a ten-ton tank, Vera was still a lady and it seemed to Henderson that even Martians should have some respect for the female sex. But they said, "Lady, my eye!" and went to work on both of them—Martian style.

"RANDAS, I'll kill you for this!" Henderson said. The back of his head still hurt from the blow which the guide had struck from behind.

The Martian was squatting on the sand beside the human. A grin streaked his lean brown face and made him look like a dune wolf licking its chops in anticipation of good eating. "You humans 'ave a saying, before you cook your rabbit, you must first catch it."

"Pht!" Henderson answered. "This is what comes of taking Martians to Earth and educating them. They pay off your philanthropy with treachery and death."

"If we 'ave learned treachery well, we 'ave had good teachers, the best, you hu-

mans," the Martian answered. "As to death, we 'ave always known about that." The shrug of his shoulders conveyed his disinterest in this subject.

Henderson was a tall man. When he walked, which he was not doing now, there was a swashbuckling element in his stride which would have made him at home on the deck of a tall-masted ship in the days when such vessels sailed the seas of Earth. His face was browned to the color of old bronze.

"You didn't learn treachery from me," Henderson said.

"No," the Martian answered. His eloquent shrug conveyed the impression that all humans were alike and that he, for one, would like noth-



The little devils had no respect for anything—including womanhood.

ing better than to see the whole breed of them rotting on the red sands. He looked thoughtfully at the human. "Are you ready to give me the *Elouran*?"

"I've told you a dozen times I don't have it," Henderson answered. "I don't even know what it is."

The Martian spat angrily on the sand. "Humans are such liars. If you don't have the *Elouran*, why would you have me guide you here, to the lost city of the little ones? Only the *Elouran* will reveal the secret of *Telusa* to you."

"I came here to explore these ruins," Henderson said. "This city of *Telusa* is all that is left of one of the greatest scientific achievements the Martians ever made."

"Pah! These ruins are the hiding place of the greatest treasure that was ever gathered in one spot. The treasure is what brought you here, not science. You prowl these wastes like a dune wolf smelling the desert in search of the carcass of a dead *tzonan*!"

"You're nuts," Henderson said. "I know nothing about any treasure."

"But you have the *Elouran*. That is all you need to find it."

"I've told you—"

"Pah!" Anger streaking and making his face grim, Randas rose to his feet. "It will get cold here before the sun rises again. Very cold indeed. The dune wolves will prowl here, searching for blood. The gray ghosts of—" He hastily changed his mind about what he was going to say. "If you decide it is too cold here, call to me. I will be there, in the cave, where it will be nice and warm and where I will have a fire." Nonchalantly he shifted Henderson's burp gun from the crook of one arm to the other. "Also, remember, I have these." He swung from his fingers the keys of the desert buggy that had brought them here.

In this place, the desert buggy was life itself. The nearest water was at least forty Earth miles away.

Sand crunched angrily under the guide's feet as he walked away.

"You can go to the devil," Henderson said, beneath his breath. "Before the night is out, I'll send you there!" This was wishful thinking. Testing the leather thongs that bound his hands and feet to stout pegs sunk deep into the sand, he found it was as he

had thought. Neither the leather nor the pegs would give.

The sun was a thin red disk on the edge of the horizon, hurrying to take the plunge over the rim of Mars, when Henderson moved again. The guide, striking him from behind, had knocked him out. Recovering consciousness, he had found himself tied hand and foot to pegs driven into the sand. Working very slowly and carefully, he pushed and shoved until the back of his left hand was firmly against the leather thong pulling his wrist to the peg. The big yellow diamond in the peculiar setting on the stone began to rub against the leather. The diamond itself was worthless, or practically so. Otherwise Randas would never have left it on his finger. Henderson had no desire to wear a valuable stone, which would only attract thieves. This stone served a quite different purpose than ornamentation.

Originally it had contained poison. A tiny blade could be projected from the diamond to deal a death blow to an enemy. The Martian mind, always alert for new ways to deal death, had found this ingenious. Henderson wore

the ring as a curiosity. As the tiny blade flicked out and began to scrape against the tough leather, he wondered if it would be the means of saving his life. He had no delusions that Randas intended to let him escape alive. To do so would be to invite retaliation, which all wise Martians avoided by killing their enemies first. Henderson could hear the tiny blade scraping against the tough leather. Suddenly the taut thong let go.

The human did not move a muscle until darkness had fallen. Then he stripped the other thongs from him, rose to his feet, and headed toward the cave where he could see the firelight twinkling. He wanted the Martian's neck under his fingers. As he approached the entrance to the cave a scream rang out inside.

Henderson threw himself flat on the sand. His body outlined against the glow coming from inside, Randas leaped into view at the entrance. As if to ward off an invisible antagonist, the guide was beating the air with his free hand. This failing, he suddenly brought the burp gun into action and began to fire blindly with it.

The roar of the furious little weapon filled the night with thunder. Henderson, staring, could see nothing that might be a target for the explosive slugs.

Leaping from the mouth of the cave, screaming at the top of his voice, the guide began to run. Henderson lay very still. The screams died into silence in the distance. The night was left taut with silence and with unseen menace.

"He ran as if devils were after him!" the amazed thought came into Henderson's mind. An instant later, he wondered how close he had come to the truth. Were there devils here? The natives in this region gave these old ruins a wide berth, considering them to be haunted. Cold passed over the skin of the human at this thought. "Nuts!" Henderson did not believe in devils and he despised anyone who did.

Tinkle . . . tinkle . . . tinkle. . . . Through the cold thin air came the sound of tiny silver bells. Chills that did not come from the cold of the night passed over Henderson's skin at the sound. There was something about the tinkling bell tones that seemed to reach inside his body and

touch every nerve there. He felt his skin crawl and the hair rise on his head.

Henderson had never heard such a sound before. He had never read of tones like these. He had never imagined tones could exist which would rub nerves raw. He felt a spasm start just under his midriff. It spread upward and down through his body, jerking and tightening muscles. He had the impression that his body had begun to spin on a vertical axis. In an effort to stop this, he dug his hands into the sand. The spinning sensation increased. The subjective impression came into his dazed mind that he was lying still and that Mars was spinning like a top around him. He swayed.

Trying to hold on to the madly spinning planet, he blacked out. He did not know how long he was out. When he came back to consciousness, the first sound he expected to hear were the bell tones. Instead he heard words.

"Wake up!" Somebody was saying, near him.

As soon as he heard the words, Henderson was convinced that this was delusion, some fantasy of a distorted mind in the process of dissolution, for two reasons. The

words were in English. The speaker was a woman.

Women were rare on Mars. The wild, bleak, bitter Red Planet did not appeal to them. Only a few, born to adventure, had dared to come to this place, death's outpost.

Of the women who had come to Mars, Henderson was utterly certain that none of them had dared venture into the ruins of *Telusa*. He opened his eyes, to dispel this delusion. A woman was bending over him.

"I don't believe in devils," he said, firmly. "Go away."

"Good. You are awake. Now all you have to do is get to your feet."

"No matter how they are disguised, or how they talk, I still don't believe in devils," Henderson said.

"I'm no devil," the woman answered. "Get up."

"You have to be. Nobody but devils could exist in this place." If this was illogical, Henderson was not going to admit the defection from straight thinking. "I'm going to stay right here until you go away. Please leave quietly."

"Devil or no devil, if you lie there any longer, you'll freeze to death." Her voice grew sharp. The toe of her

boot was even sharper, as it landed in Henderson's ribs with a mighty jab.

The archaeologist hastily sat up. "By thunder, I am not accustomed to such treatment." Reaching out, he grabbed the woman's leg and jerked, hard. She hit the sand with a thump that to Henderson, smarting from the impact of the boot on his ribs, was very pleasing. "Maybe you are a woman. No devil would hit the sand with such a loud thump!" He laughed and reached out and touched her. "Just to make sure." He jerked his hand away as she slapped at it. "Yep! You are a woman." Satisfaction was in his voice.

Smack! Her open palm came across his face. "If you do that again, I'll—"

He got quickly to his feet. "Easy, lady. I've admitted you are a woman. Don't try to prove the point by acting like a female."

"You're like all the others. As soon as you meet a woman, the first thing you do is to try to make passes."

"Madam, I was merely checking to make certain you were real," Henderson answered. "As to the other it's too damned dark for me to tell how you look, but the odds are if I could see your face,

you'd be about the last female I'd want."

"Why do you say that?" she demanded.

"Because nobody but an old crow would ever be found in a place like this."

"How do you know that I'm an old crow? You can't see in the dark." She was angry, but under the anger was laughter.

"I have cat eyes," Henderson said, leering. "What's your name? What are you doing here? How did you happen to come along just in time to wake me up?" He made his voice heavy with outrage. "Nice nap I was having there too."

"You were probably drunk," the woman answered. "My name is Vera. As to what I am doing here, that's my business."

"Vera?" Henderson repeated the word. "Not Vera Clennon?"

"Yes. Have you heard of me?"

"Who hasn't? You're a legend on Mars." Henderson was silent, trying to recall what he had heard of this woman. An adventuress of the first water, she had come to the Red Planet on the first ship that had brought passengers here. The stories told about her in Space City were

legion, how she had explored the hell-hole of the north desert alone, how she had met brawling free-booter Jack Brannigan and had faced him down with her guns. When she had first arrived, the nearest males had begun making passes at her. The result had been two men with bullet holes in their hands. This had stopped the passes. Or so the stories said. Anyway, she was quite a gal.

Henderson gave his name. "It is a privilege to meet you, even in the dark."

"Some men would have thought it was a privilege to meet me in the dark," the girl answered, laughing.

"How did you happen to come along?"

"It was simple. I heard gun shots."

"And started looking?"

"Of course. Was there something wrong about that?"

Henderson shook his head. "No, not wrong, but it called for more bravery than most men possess. Lady, you've got more—*pardon the expression*—guts than any woman has a right to have."

"I thought perhaps some natives had cornered a white man. As it turned out, there was nothing to be scared of."

Only a man, drunk, and in danger of freezing to death."

"I was not drunk," Henderson said, indignantly.

"Then why had you passed out cold?"

"There were bells—" he said vaguely.

"What kind of bells?" The girl's voice was sharp in the silent night.

"Funny bells. They knocked me out."

"You were lucky they did not kill you!" The girl's voice grew even more sharp.

"Where did they come from?"

"From the cave there." Henderson gestured toward the cliff. "By thunder, I had almost forgotten them."

"Are you in shock?" The girl shook his shoulder.

"I was, a little." Henderson sucked air into his lungs and wished it was the wine-rich atmosphere of Earth. Slowly, a fog seemed to clear out of his mind. She began to pull at his arm. "Where are you going?"

"To my camp."

"I'm not accustomed to spending the night with ladies."

"I'm not a lady. I'm Vera Clennon. I—" She stopped moving and stood very still. "Shhh! Don't make a sound. Don't move a muscle."

Bells were chiming softly

in the night air. Inside, Henderson was aware of the existence of turmoil. Something inside him seemed to recognize, and to hate, this bell sound, yet he was not even certain he was hearing it through his ears. Perhaps the impulse traveled through some medium other than air and was detected by some sense other than hearing, yet he had the impression that he was hearing it. He knew his eyes were bulging in their sockets in an effort to see.

Beside him, the girl stood utterly still. Did she know the meaning of these bells? She seemed scared stiff.

Tinkle . . . tinkle . . . tinkle. . . . They sounded like the bells of reindeers pulling the sled of Santa Claus across the sands of Mars. Sweeping to a crescendo of sound, they halted directly in front of him. Henderson dimly discerned a dark blob, without shape, and visible only because it was darker than the night. The blob was perhaps three feet high.

Becoming a sudden fury of malevolent sound, the bells increased in intensity. Whatever the dark blob on the sand was, it was aware of the two humans. Henderson felt a sudden wave of giddiness

pass through him. At the same time, the spinning sensation hit him.

The girl spoke, in Martian, a single word, "*Elouran!*"

Instantly the bells stopped ringing. Henderson, starting to reel, pulled himself back to balance.

"*Nokal te Elouran?*" A thin reedy voice, hardly above a whisper, spoke in Martian asking a question.

"*Yo,*" the girl answered. "Yes."

"*Ti sen! Ti sen!*" Sudden excitement sounded in the whispering voice. "Come with me."

The dark blob moved and the girl followed. Henderson reached out and caught her by the shoulder. "Hold the deal. What is this and where is it taking us?"

As he spoke, the bell sounds flurried again through the thin air.

"He's a Martian pygmy," the girl whispered. "He's a descendant of the race that built this city."

"I've heard of them," Henderson answered. Memories flicked through his mind of the legends of the little people that he had heard. "But where is he taking us?"

"What difference does it make? Would you rather defy

him, and die?" The girl's voice was a frozen whisper rising above the bell sounds. "We only hear part of those tones. The super-sonic part, which we don't hear, will produce death almost instantly, if he turns it on at full force."

"But—"

"There are no buts. I know what I'm talking about." The girl moved toward the waiting blob. As Henderson hesitated, the bell sounds increased in strength. Again the dizziness started to sweep through his body. Hastily, his senses reeling, he followed the girl.

"Now you are showing sense," she said.

"Maybe we're jumping out of the frying pan into the fire," he protested.

"Don't worry. I have something they want. They'll do anything to get it."

"You seem to know a hell of a lot about them."

"I've been studying, and searching for them, for years. One of the big secrets of all Mars is right here in this ruined city." Excitement rose in her voice.

They moved directly toward the cave which Randas had quitted so hastily. Inside, the fire still flickered against the wall. Light from the

flames gave Henderson a good look at the blob. For the first time, he could see that it was a pygmy Martian, not over three feet tall, covered from head to feet in a black robe made out of some kind of cloth that seemed to flow like liquid around his body. Mentally, Henderson named the pygmy Little Joe. "I could jump him—" he began.

"It would be the last jump you ever made!" the girl answered. "Besides, if we work this right—" Her voice went into excited silence.

The light of the fire was left behind as the cave narrowed. Ahead of them, Little Joe kept moving forward, sure that they would follow and sure where he was going. Henderson did not find the pygmy's sureness comforting. Nor did Vera. As if seeking for security in this place of darkness, the girl's hand sought Henderson's arm. He patted her hand. She drew closer to him. He knew that this woman, in spite of her bravery, was suddenly a frightened little girl.

"I wish I had a gun," he muttered.

"There's a fortune here," she whispered.

"So Randas indicated."

"And something else, some secret which the old Martians knew, but which these pygmies have lost."

"And—death," he said.

Her grip tightened on his arm. "If death, so what? Life has been fun. I'll bet it will keep on being fun, in a different way, after we're dead."

He patted her hand again. "I'm still capable of jumping Little Joe—"

"No. Without him, we would never get into this place."

"What's worrying me is how we are going to get out of it."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

Ahead of them, Little Joe stopped. A section of wall rolled backward on silent hinges. Beyond it was a cavern that stretched away for miles in every direction. The place was filled with a dim golden light that seemed to come from the very molecules of the air itself, which seemed to be radiating the frequency of the golden radiation. Beside him, Henderson heard Vera gasp.

In the center of the cavern was a pedestal in front of a golden ball. Henderson had the impression that the golden ball was a machine of some kind, not a machine in

the sense of human engineering, there were no wheels, no cogs, no levers, but the feeling was that energy was being transformed in the golden ball and that useful work of some kind was being done. What kind of work? Henderson did not know, he could not guess. His hunch was that this vast ball had been operating on stored power for a long time, but that the supply of power was becoming dangerously low. In consequence, the lives of the inhabitants of this cavern were threatened.

As the door swung shut behind them, pygmies began running toward them from all directions. The two humans loomed above them like giants in Lilliput. Curiosity showed on the faces of the pygmies, and something else.

"They don't like us," Henderson said.

"We're the first humans they ever saw. They don't know anything about us. Besides, I can handle them." Vera seemed utterly confident of herself.

Little Joe pointed at the girl. "*Elouran!*" he shouted. "She has the Elouran!"

A gasp went up from the pygmies surrounding them. Eager interest suddenly brought every small face to

life. "*Elouran! Elouran! Elouran!*" they began to chant, until the whole cavern rang with the sound.

"Whatever the *Elouran* is, it's certainly good news to them!" Henderson said.

Little Joe held out his hand toward Vera. "Give me the *Elouran!*" he said, in Martian.

The smile the girl gave him would have disarmed any human male. "Of course," she said. "I brought it to this city so I could give it to its rightful owners as soon as I could find them."

"You 'ave found them," Little Joe said.

"Just as soon as you give us permission to study your world here, and agree to help us when we are ready to leave, I will give you the *Elouran*." Again the girl put on her brightest smile. Underneath it, Henderson could see rising fear.

"You will give it to me right now, without conditions," the pygmy leader answered.

"I don't have it in my possession at this moment—"

"You lie!"

The girl's right hand started inside the heavy fur-lined leather jacket she was wearing. Little Joe flung up his

hand. Instantly the bell sounds began.

For the first time, Henderson saw the source from which they came. Little Joe was holding an oddly-shaped piece of clear crystal in his hand. It had a grip for his fingers and it looked a little like a gun, except that it had no barrel. Instead a small ball of crystal projected upward from the top of the weapon. The bell sounds came from the crystal. Henderson knew that crystals were used to control the frequency of radio transmitters but this was the first time he had seen one used to produce not only audible sounds but also vibrations in the supersonic range that would play havoc with the nervous system of a human being.

He also knew he had to act. Taking a quick step forward, his hand went down in a jarring blow across the wrist of the Martian pygmy. The crystal weapon was knocked from Little Joe's hand. It struck the floor of the cavern, and blasted the air with a cacophony of wild bell sounds. Henderson felt the supersonic vibrations hit him. Also, the pygmies charged toward him. Catching Little Joe, he lifted the pygmy leader and flung him

into the faces of the onrushing tribe.

The girl's sharp cry of warning rang out. He ignored it. Reaching down, he started to pick up the crystal weapon. As his fingers touched it, the full force of the supersonic vibrations were transmitted up his right arm. The effect was that of a heavy electrical shock. His right arm was paralyzed. At the same time, the vibrations were instantly transmitted into his central nervous system.

The cavern began to spin. It turned faster and faster. He fell forward to the floor, and into unconsciousness.

When consciousness returned, he found he could not move. A heavy paralysis had settled into every muscle in his body. To his left, what seemed to be a wrestling match was in progress. Turning his head by great effort, he saw what was happening.

The pygmies had Vera on her back on the floor of the cavern and were stripping her naked. Her heavy fur-lined leather jacket was already off and they were tearing at her other garments. She was putting up a good fight. While Henderson, unable to move, stared, he saw two pygmies fly away from

her vigorous kicks upward. However, it was a losing show. One pygmy jerked a heavy belt, and the attached gun, from around her waist. Another snatched off a shoulder holster, containing a second gun. Little Joe stowed both weapons away into pockets in his black robe.

Vaguely, Henderson wondered how many guns she carried! He tried to move. Although Little Joe had retrieved his own weapon and the bell notes were not sounding, Henderson's muscles felt like very old, very stiff leather. Vera's sweater was torn from her body.

"She's a pretty sight," he thought appreciatively. With the sweater gone, another gun was revealed, taped to the skin under her right arm. "A regular walking arsenal!" Henderson thought. "But what are they looking for?"

His question was answered as a pygmy hand jerked at a chain around her neck. On the end of it was a round pouch made of leather. At the sight of this leather pouch, Little Joe moved forward quickly and took it from the hand of the pygmy who had uncovered it. Swiftly the Martian leader removed the contents of the pouch.

His cry of triumph echoed

through the vast cavern. Held upward in his hand was a circle of blue stone perhaps two inches in diameter and about a quarter of an inch thick, a jewel that shone with such intense blue illumination that it seemed to be alive. It shifted and changed in hues, ranging from an intense dark blue to a very light blue tint. Light glowed within the jewel in indescribably beautiful colors.

"*The Elouran!*" Little Joe screamed. Growing triumph was in his voice. He held the glittering jewel aloft for all to see.

Instantly every pygmy took up the shout. The whole cavern echoed and re-echoed to the single word, "*Elouran!*" endlessly repeated. Then every pygmy threw himself flat on the floor.

"They worship that jewel!" Henderson thought. "It's their tribal fetish!"

A chant started up as the pygmies began to repeat again the single word, "*Elouran!*"

Slowly, in time to the chant, Little Joe began to move toward the golden ball in the center of the cavern. As he approached the machine, the blue jewel began to glow with a brighter light.

The Martian leader reached the pedestal. Moving a slow step at a time, Little Joe went upward. Reaching the top, he stood there. He lifted his hand and the chanting went into quick silence.

"My poor dear!" Henderson heard a whisper near him. "Have they paralyzed you?"

It was Vera. She had crawled to his side and was kneeling over him.

"Whee-whew!" he whistled.

"I ought to slap you!" she answered, her face turning scarlet. "At a time like this—"

"Save the slapping until later," he answered. "If there is a later for us. *What is the Elouran?*"

"It's a key of some kind, desperately important to these pygmies. It was stolen from them, by a renegade whom they had befriended, before the first spaceship containing humans landed on Mars."

"How did you get it?"

"I got the jewel, and its history, from a tribesman I found dying in the desert. He was very grateful to me for helping him. Before he died, he told me the whole story of the *Elouran*, as he knew it. He insisted that

these pygmies would pay any price for it."

"He must have forgot to mention they would also cut your throat for it."

"I still don't believe they're really bad," Vera answered. "It's a matter of life or death to them. They've simply got to have this jewel if they want to continue living. Watch!"

On top of the pedestal, Little Joe was holding the jewel aloft. It swirled with brilliant blue light. He reached forward and fitted the *Elouran* into a niche in the golden ball in front of him.

Thud!

As the jewel slid into the niche, somewhere in the depths of the ball a relay went home with a grunting rumble. A heavy throbbing followed. The floor of the cavern shook gently. From the prostrate pygmies a moan went up.

"That jewel is more than a fetish," Henderson said. "It's a catalyst of some kind and it starts a reaction inside the golden ball. Now what?"

The moaning sound from the pygmies had changed. Rising again, it had carried undertones of terror. Suddenly the terror was gone. Ecstasy had taken its place.

The dim golden light that filled the cavern was becoming more golden as if the molecules of the air were being recharged. As this happened, the ecstasy of the pygmies increased. One leaped to his feet. Others followed.

What followed was the wildest, most ecstatic dance that Henderson—or possibly any human—had ever seen. The frenzies of the Bacchanals on Earth in the old days had been nothing in comparison. The ecstacies of the whirling dervishes did not approach it. The wildest gyrations of the best Russian ballet were nothing in comparison to the dance of the pygmies around the golden ball in the center of their hidden world beneath the ancient city of *Telusa*.

"Good lord! The thing's a drug—a goof ball," Henderson muttered.

"I think I know what has happened," Vera said slowly. "The golden ball charges the air of this cavern with some kind of energy that is vital to their very existence. With the *Elouran* missing for so long, the energy levels in the air have sunk so low that the pygmies have been practically dead."

"Now, with the *Elouran*

back, they're alive again," Henderson commented. "I wish I could say the same for us."

As he spoke, Little Joe began to descend from the pedestal. The pygmy leader had completely changed. He had barely been able to climb the steps. Now he descended with an easy grace. His steps were light and graceful as he approached the two humans. His round moon face beamed with happiness. The dancers made way for him, forming an avenue through which he approached.

He bowed low before the girl. "We owe our lives to you. Ask what you will." His round face beamed with good will.

Hope as bright as the dawn of an Earth day gleamed in the girl's eyes. Dramatically, her hand came up to point at Henderson. "Cure him. Release him from his paralysis." She was so excited that she spoke in English. When the leader's face revealed that he did not understand her, she repeated the words in Martian.

Little Joe bowed again. Lifting the crystal weapon, he made a slight adjustment in it. Again it was pointed at Henderson. The bell sounds rang out.

This time the chiming was different. It had a soft, soothling, lulling quality about it. The supersonic frequencies penetrated deep into the body of the human. He felt a pleasing warmth come into existence. The paralysis began to disappear.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat—

The whole cavern echoed to the blast of sudden gunfire. Little Joe's beaming moon-face seemed to collapse inward. Then it gouted blood. The Martian leader sprawled forward, dead.

Behind him, the pygmies went down like wheat before the mowing blade as the blast of explosive slugs struck them.

Still the blast of fire continued. *Rat-tat-tat-tat—*

"Get down!" Henderson shouted. As he spoke, he saw that he did not need to tell Vera what to do. At the first burst of fire, she had thrown herself flat.

Twisting, Henderson saw that Randas was standing in the doorway of the cavern. The guide had followed them here. He had Henderson's burp gun in his hands.

The bell sounds from the crystal weapon were still chiming softly in Henderson's ear where the weapon had fallen from Little Joe's

dying hand. With a tremendous effort of will, the human forced his still reluctant muscles to move enough to enable him to pick it up. A tiny sliding catch on the top was the only way he could see to change its method of operation. He slid the catch forward. Instantly the bell sounds shifted from soft soothing notes to tones of anger.

Pointing the weapon at Randas, he pushed it to full power.

The supersonic vibrations hit the guide. He stumbled and went forward to his knees.

Henderson felt paralysis shoot up his arm in an agonizing wave of spurting pain. He dropped the weapon. Only a pygmy, conditioned for many years to its use, could withstand the supersonic vibrations.

Randas got to his feet again. Burp gun in his hands, his eyes roved the cavern seeking for the source of the bell sounds. Pygmies were fleeing in all directions. He began to shoot again, recklessly, at them. He was wild and desperate.

"Nice try," Vera whispered. Flat on the floor, she was still trying to smile.

"What happened to your guns?"

"Little Joe put them inside his robe."

Movement was agony but Henderson forced his painful muscles to move again. He got one hand inside the pockets of the dead Martian's robe. A weapon came out, a flat, compact automatic that fired a maximum power cartridge. Using Little Joe's body as a rest, Henderson lined up the sights and pulled the trigger.

At the high-powered *spang* of the automatic, Randas threw up his hands and pitched forward.

"Good shot!" the girl exclaimed.

"Good gun," Henderson said. He got slowly and painfully to his feet. Walking was torture but he forced his cramped, aching muscles to move his body forward. The girl snatched another of her weapons from inside the robe of the pygmy leader and moved into step beside him. He noted with detached amusement that she grabbed for a gun before she even thought of getting dressed. He decided this was more important. On Mars, a girl could get along without many clothes, but she was certain to need a gun.

Randas lay sprawled on the floor. Henderson leaned over and picked up the burp gun. Beyond the body of the guide, the door leading outward into the caves, and then to the surface of Mars, was invitingly open. He looked at it, then shook his head. "I didn't come this far to run now."

"What do you intend to do?" the girl asked.

"What I was thinking was, as you said, these little people are not half bad. They've lost their leader and they have the remnants of a once-great science here, waiting to be rediscovered and put to use again. Also—"

"Also what?" the girl said.

A sound came from behind Henderson. Turning, he saw that the pygmies were returning. Soon they surrounded the two humans with a sea of wistful frightened, yet somehow yearning faces.

"We are the first humans they have ever seen."

"And?" the girl said.

"What I am thinking is that we ought to stay here and be king and queen of the pygmies," he answered boldly.

The girl's answering smile was just as bold. "They're willing. And so am I. So what are we waiting on?"

THE END



THE SPACE CLUB

"I simply could not resist your friendly call in the March issue: '... we've got everybody in, but you.' In *The Space Club*, I mean. So here I am, answering your call from the heart of the busy, modern capitol of Brazil." This from an ex-British RAF pilot, Ignacio Stanley Pisulinsky, Cia Lithogr. Ypiranga, R. Dos Gusmoes, 457. Sao Paulo, Brazil. He is well aware of the exciting world-wide contacts that can be made through *The Space Club*. So get with it, gang. Start shooting those letters along the spaceways. And remember, anyone under twenty-one years of age who wants to be listed on these pages must have their parent's signature on their letter.

MIKE BARNES, 215 SAN JACINTO, HIGHLANDS, TEXAS. . . . Mike is a 14-year-old science fiction advocate. He also likes chess, astronomy and amateur telescope making.

GEORGE H. DEWING, 15 BAKER AVE., WEYMOUTH 88, MASS. . . . 16 years old, 5'10", 150 pounds. Sophomore printer. Would like to hear from s-f fans who like Rock 'n' Roll.

LINDA GODNICK, 11 ETON RD., ROCKVILLE CENTRE, N. Y. . . . Linda is a junior in high school. She is most enthusiastic about science fiction, Rock 'n' Roll, and letter writing.

JAMES GUILLERMO, RT. 2, BOX 459A GALT, CALIF. . . . In recent years James has discovered that he enjoys reading science fiction. He is 22 years old, 5'11". His hobbies: stamp and coin collecting.

HAROLD HOUGHTON, BOX 86, R. C. A. F. STATION, CHATHAM, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA. . . . A 25-year-old member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Harold's hobbies include photography, and s-f. He hopes to hear from a lot of Space Clubbers.

JOHN N. MARX, JR., WATERBURY, NEBR. . . . 19 years old, John is attending college. He reads all the science fiction magazines he can manage to get and would like to discuss them with other club members. He also likes popular music.

RONALD MASON, 79 ONTARIO ST., TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA. . . . Ronald has been a science fiction reader for as far back as he can remember. He is 23 years old. His main hobbies are photography, coin collecting and leather craft. He is very fond of music, plays the guitar, and he's interested in almost every branch of science.

PRESTON MC. DALE, P. O. BOX 2534, SAN AUGUSTINE, TEXAS. . . . 15-year-old Preston is on his way to acquiring a top-notch collection of science fiction books. The things that fascinate him most are space travel, E.S.P. and flying saucers.

TOM MILLS, BOX 71, GUADALUPE, CALIF. . . . Tom is looking forward to hearing from other s-f fans. He is 15 years old and a chess player. Playing the game by mail can be lots of fun and Tom hopes that other members of The Space Club will take on a game with him.

JOHN PETERSON, NORTH GEORGIA COLLEGE, BOX 5765, DAHLONEGA, GEORGIA. . . . 19 years old, John is a sophomore at North Georgia College. He is majoring in History. Among his interests are chess, s-f, records, especially classics, and tennis.

RON SARGENT, 1880 PARKDALE, TOLEDO, OHIO. . . . Ron thinks that The Space Club is a great idea. He feels that it's one place where the s-f reading population can meet and stick together. 14 years old, Ron's interests are astronomy, writing and the future.

LYDIA SIEFERT, RT. 2, PLAINFIELD, WISCONSIN. . . . Lydia lives on a farm in Wisconsin where it gets pretty lonely. She would like to spend

some of her time exchanging notes with other science fiction fans throughout the world.

A/2c WILLIAM P. SLAGAUGH, AF 28154442, BOX 994, USAFSS, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS. . . . "How about making me a member of your Space Club? I'm 20 years old, 6'1" tall, 190 pounds. A science fiction bug, I'm also crazy about football."

DAVID E. SNYDER, 1027 9TH ST., APT. 28, LOS ALAMOS, N. M. . . . David is a 28-year-old laboratory technician in Los Alamos. In addition to science fiction he enjoys sports, popular music, auto racing and science.

LARRY TUTTLE, 1618 DOMINION AVE., NORFOLK 3, VA. . . . Larry is interested in Aviation, U.F.O.'s, electronics, historical fiction and of course, science fiction. Those with similar interests would enjoy dropping Larry a line.

GEORGE WELLS, BOX 486, RIVERHEAD, N. Y. . . . George is 14 years old. His interests include s-f, rhythm and blues, chess, politics, writing letters and stories.

JULIAN WHIPPLE, 104-B FAIRMONT AVE., KINGSTON, N. Y. . . . An s-f fan for five years 14-year-old Julian is also interested in astronomy and chemistry. She is quite a collector. Under this category come stamps, old swords, knives, firearms and s-f books.



...OR SO YOU SAY

BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

Have just finished the May issue of *Amazing* and here's about how I rate it: "The Edge of the Knife," very good; "No World for the Timid," when you say raw, you mean it; the other stories were fair. I liked the letter column very much, except that my name is Robert W. West not Robert D. Dest.

I sure am glad you discontinued the serials though, because that "Cosmic Kill" gave me a headache. I saved the first installment without reading it, then about a week ago I lost it. It's difficult sometimes to keep track of the serials, even two part ones.

Robert W. West
6437 Grant Ave.
Carmichael, Calif.

• Sorry you lost the first installment of "Cosmic Kill," and because we don't want you to miss a fine yarn, a complimentary copy of that issue is on the way to you.

Dear Editor:

My own opinion concerning "The Edge of the Knife" is that it is an excellent tale. It happens to be in a field that I am interested in. Both plot and characters are very good.

For the past three years, most of my reading, in addition to my regular s-f magazines, has dealt with some aspect of the subject matter of this story. Having had some experience with precognition at various times in my life, I find it a fascinating study. I have also experimented with hypnosis in delving into the subconscious mind, even trying self hypnosis, and the more I study it, the more interested I become. From my reading and experiments, I firmly believe

that most all of us ordinary mortals have abilities and "memories" within our subconscious minds that would be just as unusual as those of Professor Chalmers in this story.

A recent example of my own: I am a real estate broker, and among other things, I do Income Tax preparation for my customers each spring. Recently, I had two men whom I had never seen come into the office to have me do their tax forms. They were filing joint returns with their wives, who did not work, so the only W2 forms were for the men. I did both forms, including the names of their wives, without asking them their names, and didn't realize it until I had finished. I suddenly realized I had not asked the men their wives' names, and on both forms I had put the name Mary. I had visions of the work involved in re-copying both forms, as I asked each man what his wife's name was. Both replied at the same time, "Mary." The only unfortunate thing about this is I never know when it's happening, until it has happened, which is frustrating when you are trying to bring this up consciously and can't. Anyway, any more stories you get along this line will be welcomed by at least one of your regular readers.

C. Edward Woods
13731 Gratiot
Ramona Theatre Bldg.
Detroit 5, Mich.

• *Experiences of others in this field will be published in this column as they come in. Thanks, Mr. Woods, for sending us yours.*

Dear Editor:

You asked for comments on "The Edge of the Knife" and all I can say is it's a great story.

What's the matter with that guy who's griping about The Space Club? I've met some very nice friends through The Space Club. Please be sure to keep it a regular feature.

Marvin Pfeifer
R.R. 1
Paw Paw, Illinois

• *We wouldn't dare drop the Space Club, Marvin. We'd be mobbed by its many fans.*

Dear Editor:

My opinion about "The Edge of the Knife": It was something new in a science fiction story. Why was it "too hot to handle"? Was it because the death of Khalid ib'n Hussein referred to the present king of Jordan, King Hussein? Did the rejecting authors think it would

cause some sort of mix-up in our international foreign relations with Jordan?

A few other comments: expand the letter column. Bring back the "Spectroscope." Keep the quizzes concerned with science, that is if you're going to continue to have "Test Your Space I.Q." in the magazine.

Thanks for listing my name in The Space Club. I've gotten several letters and have 10 chess games going by mail.

Stephen Sala
Osburn, Idaho

• *As many readers have pointed out, there were several factors that made "The Edge . . ." a hot property. You've hit one of them. Hope you win all ten of those chess games.*

Dear Editor:

It's about time you had a story by a "name" writer. "The Edge of the Knife" by H. Beam Piper was a fine yarn with a good surprise ending. I didn't find anything in it to make it "too hot to handle" though.

The remainder of the issue was also surprisingly good, especially "No World for the Timid." There was only one story I could gripe about, and that was the Arnette serial. Will you please explain how a story that takes about 50 pages rates being broken up into parts? I'm glad you quit that policy. If you could get a really good long serial, I wouldn't object to that.

John N. Marx, Jr.
Waterbury, Nebr.

• *I think maybe we've hit the happy solution in publishing long science fiction novels under our new title: Amazing Science Fiction Novels. Certainly hope you agree.*

Dear Editor:

"Cosmic Kill" retained all of the flavor and action of "Empire of Evil," another adventure classic.

I don't understand why you aren't going to use more serials. Surely a month isn't too long to wait, if the story is worth waiting for. It seemed to me that your recent continued tales weren't really long enough to warrant serialization.

You'll find that most of the other leading s-f mags. use serials as a matter of course—if the readers can't wait a month, let them save up their old copies until they have the complete story. Most really good stories can't be told in just one issue. Short stories—sure. But

a complete novel has a lot of characters that can only be fully developed in the longer form.

By all means keep the book reviews! I don't read them for advice on which books to buy—I have them before they are reviewed, but I just simply get a kick out of finding someone else's opinion on a book I've read.

I can't understand how a fine writer like Randy Garrett can produce work like he does, then turn around and come up with that "Kyvor" nonsense. Just a satire on Edgar Rice Burroughs, and not even a very good satire.

I'm looking forward to those new full length novels that you've been promising.

Roger Ebert
410 E. Washington
Urbana, Illinois

• *This may be a good time to give out the first word on a novelette we've scheduled for the September issue of Amazing's companion book Fantastic. Henry Slesar wrote it and we honestly feel it has one of the most daring themes ever to be treated in modern-day fiction. The title is "The Cave of Miracles." And we promise this: The story, once read, will not leave your mind for a long, long time. We urge you, in complete sincerity, not to miss this composure-shattering story.*

Dear Editor:

I have just put down the May *Amazing*. My only reason for such an action is to write this letter telling you how much I enjoyed Piper's "The Edge of the Knife." As soon as I finish this letter I have every intention of finishing the issue.

Being a believer in E.S.P., which Prof. Chalmers most certainly must have had, I cannot explain just how much I enjoyed the story. To me the theory behind the story is very probable.

A/2c Stanley L. Eisenberg
916th A.C.th SQDN.
Beashejour, Manitoba, Canada

• *There have been too many controlled demonstrations of ESP to leave room for belief in sheer chance as being a prime factor.*

Dear Editor:

"The Edge of the Knife" ! ! ! ! ! ! ! SEQUEL—SEQUEL.
Larry Hooker
211 First Street
Davis, California

Dear Editor:

What an issue! "The Edge of the Knife" was excellent. Regarding the tag "too hot to handle," it all depends on which way one takes it. It fits today's Middle East situation. The real King Hussein's assassination would serve as a time bomb in the present crisis.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

- *We think you hit it right on the head. After all, everything depends on the individual point of view.*

Dear Ed:

Thought I'd give some comment on the May issue. Why was the lead novel "too hot to handle"? It wasn't a very good story. Short s-f stories—all no good. Illustrations also poor. And while I'm at it, how about an editorial one of these days. I hope that you don't call those three hundred words an editorial.

Edward Gorman, Jr.
119 1st Ave., S.W.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

- *Sorry, Mr. Gorman. We'll try harder on those three hundred words in the future.*

Dear Editor:

Just completed H. Beam Piper's story "The Edge of the Knife" in the May issue of *Amazing*. Had to drop you a line and tell you that it added up to some excellent reading.

Anthony David Mielke SN
0111 Security Department
Building 27
Great Lakes, Illinois

- *That yarn is beginning to make H. Beam Piper an even bigger name than he was before.*

Dear Ed:

I know you have already made the decision, but I must have my say. You really started off great with "Quest" and "Cosmic Kill." With these two under my belt I was getting ready for a run of serials and shorts. I don't see as it will hurt anyone to wait another month for the next installment, in fact a serial is all the more reason for getting the next issue.

The one thing that compensates for the elimination of serials is the news that there will be an *Amazing Science Fiction Novel*. Please don't let that idea go to the dogs.

Walter Orlandini
5959 West Grace Street
Chicago 34, Illinois

• You've no doubt read "20 Million Miles . . ." by now, Mr. Orlandini. Perhaps you've already written us demanding more science fiction novels. Remember, by your demands, we know your wishes.

Dear Editor:

It was a real pleasure to read "The Edge of the Knife," a story that is just plain good. I don't see why it was considered "too hot to handle." Maybe I missed the point. "No World for the Timid" left me with a chill crawling up my spine.

A/2c William P. Slabaugh
AF 28154442
Box 994, USAFSS
San Antonio, Texas

• This editor has read a lot of stories, but the chill of "No World for the Timid" is still with him.

Dear Editor:

Enjoyed the April *Amazing* very much. The Johnny Mayhem adventure "Think Yourself to Death" was really great, I can't get enough of him. "Test Your Space I.Q." is a favorite of mine. I found out I'm not really the idiot I have imagined myself to be.

Larry Tuttle
1618 Dominion Ave.
Norfolk 3, Va.

• Careful with that idiot business, Larry—even imagining it. As a reader of *Amazing*, you're automatically one of the smartest people around.

Dear Editor:

After reading "The Edge of the Knife" in the May *Amazing* I feel that you are about the only company with the nerve to publish it at this time, when so much is being written against so-called E.S.P. or precognition. It is a very fine story and we should have more of them. While this story is a little far fetched, I know that the general basis is true. I have read about some of the card tests by Dr. Rhyne at Duke and one of his test yourself problems was

printed in a fiction magazine some years back. This problem was to place five symbols in twenty-five blocks as near as you could to the way they had them on another page and if you could place eight of them correctly you were to write them and they would send you other things to study. I tried it and hit eight the first trial and on the second I hit fourteen. I did not try it further as I thought perhaps I had remembered some of the positions from the first trial.

I have made no study of E.S.P. but know there is something to it, as an inner voice has told me so many times that certain things were going to happen such as deaths, accidents, injuries, and minor things, but I have no proof.

Harry L. Robertson
Box 291, R.R. 2
House Springs, Missouri

● *We feel a tremendous advance was made along the road of scientific knowledge when manifestations of ESP, clairvoyance, thought transference, and similar phenomena were transferred from the realm of the parlor game and the seance chamber and placed under the scrutiny of unbiased, controlled examination. Thus is the fraud bugaboo removed and each incident forced to stand or fall on its individual merits.*

Dear Editor:

I want to congratulate you on the story "The Edge of the Knife." The writer's uncanny ability to tell that story, based on future worlds, but really so truthfully close to our present is truly amazing. I hope you can print more of the same, for I as a poet, and therefore somewhat of a prophet, can see so much of this particular story and, others like it, as a reality.

Blake Martin
1511½ S. Hoover St.
Los Angeles 6, Calif.

● *H. Beam Piper is now in Europe. When he returns, you can be sure we'll meet him at the boat.*

Dear Editor:

I don't know how long the May issue of *Amazing* has been on the stands, but I just picked it up today. The first thing I turned to was the letter column. I'm glad to see that you are having a column composed mostly of gripes. There are a few points I'd like to bring up. (1) Why don't you change the name of the column back to "Discussions"? (2) Why do you have only one artist on covers? (3) Why don't you go back to the large size—not pulp size but something like

Science-Fiction Plus. (4) Why don't you have a Contents page that is easy to read? (5) Why don't you have color illustrations? (6) Why do you have printing on the cover? (7) Why don't you have a back cover?

Brian Caden
3528 Vermont Ave.
Louisville, Kentucky

• *Why don't you—oops, sorry, Mr. Caden. We'll give your suggestions every consideration, and we'd like to thank you sincerely for sending them in.*

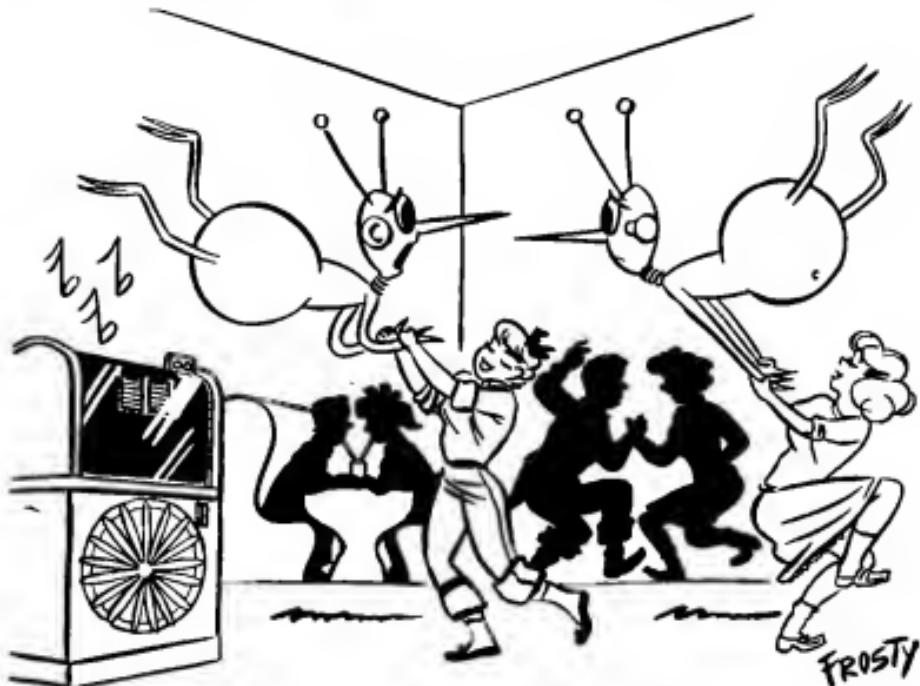
Dear Editor:

I agree with Steve Green. "Amazing But True . . ." and "Test Your Space I.Q." don't belong in *Amazing*. If that's what you want, you can find the same thing in some crossword puzzle book.

Love those Frosty cartoons. More, eh?

Richard Brown
127 Roberts St.
Pasadena 3, Calif.

• *And we've got plenty more Frosty cartoons coming up. Mr. Frost dropped in just yesterday with a sparkling batch.*



"I've had enough Rock—let's Roll."

Amazing But True . . .

How They Started

E. Philips Oppenheim, who authored 150 novels, began writing because his father required that each of his children write a story every year.

Edward Bok, famous U. S. journalist, once contributed a weekly society column to the Brooklyn Eagle at from three to four dollars a column.

Edwin Way Teale, as a small boy, attempted to sell fifty field mouse pelts to a fur store in order to realize enough money to buy a camera.

Jimmy Frise, dean of Canadian cartoonists, got his first newspaper job when he drew a picture of an editor milking a cow—on the wrong side.

Richard Arkwright made a fortune from inventing the spinning wheel but he once supported himself operating a barber shop in a cellar.



Samuel Crompton earned money to buy tools to make his spinning wheel by playing in an orchestra at eighteen pence a night on a home-made violin.



As a child the Indians taught Benjamin West how to mix colors and he used the tail of the family cat as his first paint brush.

At the age of five J. M. W. Turner drew from memory a heraldic lion which he had seen on a salver at the home of one of his father's customers.

George Washington Carver, famed Negro scientist, was raised by a farmer who traded him for a horse.



Sir George Gabriel Stokes began his study of natural history as a youth and, upon one occasion, while walking, he was unable to raise his hat to some lady friends whom he met because "it was full of beetles."

—R. S. CRAGGS

(Continued from page 3)

Palmer and Shaver will represent but two of the many viewpoints to be presented. Other experts will back explanations and theories widely divergent with whatever evidence they have available. All logical possibilities will be explored.

So don't miss the October issue of *Amazing Stories*. After reading it, you may still not know the final truth about *UFO*. But you will be far more able to judge and appraise for yourself. In a sense, you too will be an expert and the conclusions you draw will be on far more solid foundations.—PWF.



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